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# THE DRAMATIC THEORY OF GERMAN DRAMATISTS SINCE 1945: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

by

© Donna L. Sandage

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommended to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, for acceptance, a thesis entitled

THE DRAMATIC THEORY OF GERMAN DRAMATISTS SINCE 1945:

A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

submitted by DONNA L. SANDAGE

in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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Date April 11, 1974

# ABSTRACT

An analysis of German dramatic theory from the dramatists' point of view has been done only to a limited extent. By relying on the statements of persons who write plays, a closer picture of the situation in German drama can be gained. For this analysis, no set guide was used. Instead, the discussion follows the topics which the dramatists consider important. Most of the dramatists, for example, comment on their responsibilities as playwrights, the purpose and goals of theater in society, and the forms and themes which contemporary drama should have.

On questions like the dramatist's responsibility to society and the theater's function in the present-day world, the dramatists for the most part were in agreement. Although the non-political dramatists doubt that theater can change society, they feel that theater is necessary to society and that it should give society inner guidance. Instead of assigning a didactic function to theater, the trend is to let the theater persuade, to show different ways of viewing life.

On the questions concerning form and theme, however, the dramatists' opinions widely differed. West German

dramatists have chosen various forms as the ideal one in their theoretical statements. Among the popular forms are Theater of the Absurd, poetic drama, abstract theater, tragicomedy, and the political theater. East German dramatic theory is under the auspices of socialist realism and is almost entirely a political theater with a well-defined dramatic theory.

The dramatists in the West have offered parts of a dramatic theory, but have not proposed any single, unified theory. Only Friedrich Dürrenmatt has attempted any type of all-inclusive theory for the contemporary drama with his "Theaterprobleme". The reluctance to propose any complete theoretical system may stem from an uncomfortable feeling on the part of the dramatists who feel uneasy and uncertain about their roles as dramatists in society. Hence, no all-inclusive dramatic theory has been formulated, although trends and forms have gained considerable support.

# ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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# INTRODUCTION

Much writing and research exist on contemporary German drama. The dramatists, their work, and the productions of plays have been examined from various aspects. For example, Margret Dietrich, one of the many writers on drama, discusses the main trends in modern European and American drama in _Das moderne Drama_.[1] She presents a thorough survey of contemporary drama and her book is especially valuable as a quick source of reference. Peter Szondi devotes his _Theorie des modernen Dramas_ to trends and developments of dramatic theory. Siegfried Melchinger and Henning Rischbieter, editors of _Theater heute_, the leading theater magazine of West Germany, have contributed much to the study and encouragement of modern German drama in the West. Melchinger's books, _Theater der Gegenwart_ and _Modernes Welttheater_, are thorough and critical in their treatment of German drama since 1945.

Many other writers have approached German drama in a broader scope in literary surveys and studies. Wilhelm Kosch gives information on persons connected with German theater in *Deutsches-Theaterlexikon: biographisches und bibliographisches Handbuch*. Kosch includes articles on dramatic theory, history of drama, and themes as well as biographical information on playwrights. In *Der Schauspielführer*, Joseph Gregor gives more detailed attention to German drama, although he discusses plays from countries throughout the world. Benno von Wiese has also written on modern German drama in his book *Deutsche Dramaturgie vom Naturalismus bis zur Gegenwart*. Even English-speaking critics have taken an interest in recent German drama. Hugh F. Garten's *Modern German Drama* is a good introduction to contemporary German theater for non-German-speaking persons interested in the subject. Despite their all-inclusive nature, such surveys often neglect a specific theoretical aspect of drama, namely, dramatists' ideas on playwriting. At best, compilers of dramatic studies include some of the more famous theoretical essays by leading dramatists of the time. Barrett H. Clark's book *European Theories of the Drama* is an exception in that it contains most of the important theoretical writings about the making of plays. As the title suggests, Clark collects theory on drama from every European country, and a later revised edition even includes American dramatic theory. Because of their wide scope, such studies can not give a complete view of one particular national drama. The editor is forced to choose a limited number of playwright-theorists to represent one country. In *European Theories of the*

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[1] See bibliography for further information on discussed titles.

Drama, Clark chose a selection by Brecht and Dürrenmatt's "Theaterprobleme" as examples of current German dramatic theory. Without question, a more thorough study of recent German dramatic theory is justified to fill out the framework which writers like Clark have already provided.

To gain a more thorough understanding of contemporary German dramatic theory, I will examine the ideas of the people who actually write plays. It is true that a dramatist may not make a good critic and conversely, but it is not intended to interchange or cast doubt on either of the two independent roles. The inherent danger of this approach lies in the dramatist's triple role as creative writer, critic, and theorist. First and foremost, he writes plays. Secondly, a dramatist often writes criticism in which he approaches a literary work with a certain theory. This theory may be his own or it may be a set of standards already established. A third aspect of a dramatist's writing sometimes extends into a theoretical area, when he becomes a theorist in his own area of specialization. As a theorist, he writes about an envisioned drama as well as about existing drama. It is important to note that a dramatist need not apply his own theory to his dramatic writing. In each type of writing, the dramatist plays a different role. He is a playwright creating a literary work, he is a critic, judging his own or another's work, or he is a theorist thinking ahead and writing for a theater which has not yet been realized.

Ideally, a dramatist could theorize about drama and write plays to demonstrate his theory. Critics could then discuss the dramatist's theoretical applications to this work. Realistically, however, this correspondence between theory and practice rarely occurs. A discussion of how closely a dramatist follows his own theory is a thesis topic in itself. Even Bertolt Brecht, who continually revised and reworked his theories and plays, did not expect the performances of his plays to measure up to his theory. This thesis will regard a playwright's dramatic theory as an ideal to be attained when the proper state of readiness exists.

The critical analysis on my part enters into the thesis when I examine to what extent a dramatist's ideas are attainable. How sincere is a dramatist when he writes theory? He is first a writer, a craftsman with words, and his primary interest does not lie with criticism. The fact that dramatists work and play with words often makes an analysis of their theory difficult, for sometimes they may write with a "tongue-in-cheek" attitude to mock or parody critics. A statement by the dramatist Konrad Wünsche demonstrates the problems an analysis of dramatists' theoretical writings entails: "Ich bin überzeugt, dass mancher, der diese Äusserungen liest, sie ernster nimmt, als ich".[2] Friedrich Dürrenmatt offers similar words of caution:

> Sein (the dramatist) Reden ist mit Vorsicht aufzunehmen. Sein Denken über seine Kunst wandelt sich, da er diese Kunst macht, ständig, ist der Stimmung, dem Moment unterworfen.[3]

With these warnings in mind, I hope to critically analyze the playwrights' ideas.

The thesis concerns only dramatists who have commented or written on theory of drama and theater. Hence, the discussion limits itself to only a few of the many contemporary German-speaking dramatists. It would be desirable to cite examples of a dramatist's work in which he applies his theory; but, since theory and practice do not often agree, it is necessary to keep the dramatist and the theorist separate in each writer. Having pointed out the pitfalls and difficulties of this type of analysis, I will outline my work method. Primary sources comprise the bulk of the material since critical studies are of little importance to the dramatists' statements. Material comes from interviews, radio talks, and articles which the dramatists have written and presented. The magazine Theater heute proved to be an especially rich source for theoretical literature. In several cases, the theoretical writing of a dramatist was included in his collected works. After the statements were collected, similar ideas of various dramatists were juxtaposed. I had no guideline for the choice of discussion topics but relied on the topics the dramatists emphasized and considered important.

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[2] Konrad Wünsche, "Mein Ausgangspunkt ist die Rolle", Theater heute, 2 (1964), p.54.
[3] Friedrich Dürrenmatt, "Theaterprobleme", Theater-Schriften und Reden, (Zürich: Arche Verlag, 1966), p.94.

In the first chapter, I briefly summarize Bertolt Brecht's later theory and survey the dramatic theory of socialist realism. Although Brecht's ideology has not influenced the theater in the East and West as much as one would expect, he is a paradigm of the kind of dramatist this thesis concerns. He has written plays and dramatic theory which have affected modern drama. Chapter Two examines the dramatists' concepts of their roles and responsibilities in the theater-world and society. The third chapter discusses the dramatists' opinions concerning the role of drama and theater in society. After examining the purpose of drama, the following two chapters concentrate on form and style. Hence, Chapters Four and Five concern how the dramatists propose to write the ideal play. This thesis has no "thesis" as such because it does not attempt to defend a hypothesis. Instead it examines theories to see if any discernible or valid dramatic theory exists for the contemporary German theater.

# CHAPTER I

# SOCIALIST DRAMATIC THEORY

## 1. Bertolt Brecht's theory

This brief discussion of Brecht attempts in no way to offer a complete account of the man and his writings. Because so many thorough and comprehensive studies on Brecht already exist, a reiteration of the existing material would indeed be a waste of time and effort.[1] Moreover, just one aspect of Brecht, whether it be Brecht the playwright, Brecht the producer, or Brecht the theorist, would provide sufficient material for a topic all in itself. I am including Brecht in an analysis of post World-War Two German dramatic theory because he forms a link between the pre-war and post-war dramatic tradition. To a limited extent, Brecht's dramatic theory and plays gave a sense of continuity and tradition to post-war Germany. However, some of his dramatic concepts and theoretical terms which he popularized, such as the epic versus the Aristotelian theater, the "Strassenszene", and "Verfremdungseffekte", influenced the next generation of post-war playwrights.

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[1] Among the many contemporary Germanisten and literary critics who have written about Brecht are Siegfried Melchinger, Klaus Völker, Werner Mittenzwei, Martin Esslin, Mariane Kesting, Willy Haas, Werner Hecht, Hans Egon Holthusen, and John Willett. For more complete information on some of the work done on Brecht, see the bibliography.

At first the reader is quite bewildered by the confusing and seemingly contradictory nature of Brecht's theoretical writing. The question inevitably arises: Which of his theories should be taken as the definitive one? How much credence should be given his dramatic theory which underwent several stages of metamorphosis, from the Lehrstücke in the 1930's to the "Kleines Organon" in the late 1940's? Just as Brecht's theories change, so do the much batted-about terms, "episches Theater", and "Verfremdung", as they take on new meanings and uses. The directions these terms have taken is a valid topic in itself, but one which can not be pursued further in this discussion.

By the end of Brecht's exile in 1947, all his major plays had been written and he intended to construct a dramatic theory to describe them in a work called "Der Messingkauf". The word "Messingkauf" is derived from the analogy with a person who buys a brass instrument for the value of the metal rather than to make music with it.[2] Hence, the content of the theater was to be cross-examined in a practical, matter-of-fact approach. The theoretical investigation was to take the form of a discussion between four or five actors after a theater performance. They each express what they envision for the theater, as they discuss their roles as well as the audience's in the theater. Some of the discussion topics such as alienation effects, the traditonal versus the epic theater, and the street-scene model were already the subject of earlier essays by Brecht.[3] His idea was to combine the diverse articles into a coherent whole. He labeled most of his theoretical writings during his exile years "Messingkauf", which indicated that he intended to include them under the "Messingkauf Dialogs". But for an unknown reason, Brecht left the proposed work in its planning stage and never completed the rough draft.

Brecht wrote his "Kleines Organon für das Theater" after he returned to Europe; it became and has remained his most famous theoretical work of the post-war period. It is actually a condensation of much of the material he had intended for the "Messingkauf", but a more tightly organized presentation of his theory. He divides it into seventy-seven sections or paragraphs prefacing it with a prologue and appending a dozen or so changes or additional comments to various sections. Brecht states in the prologue that the purpose of his "Kleines Organon" is to define an aesthetic drawn from a particular kind of theatrical performance over the last few decades.*

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[2] John Willett explains the meaning of the term and summarizes the content of the dialogs in his editorial note to "Der Messingkauf" in The Development of an Aesthetic, (London: Methuen & Co., 1962), second ed., p.170-175.

[3] Bertolt Brecht, Schriften zum Theater, (Frankfurt a.M: Suhrkamp, 1973), V.15. All subsequent quotations from this edition will be indicated by page numbers in parentheses.

Brecht poses the question: What kind of theater is suitable for the scientific age in which we live? He then methodically proceeds to the first section and defines theater:

> Theater besteht darin, dass lebende Abbildungen von überlieferten oder erdachten Geschehnissen zwischen Menschen hergestellt werden, und zwar zur Unterhaltung (p.130).

Brecht expands his definition as he explains his idea of theater:

> Selbst wenn wir etwa diese Erweiterung vornahmen, müsste jedoch die Beschreibung der allgemeinsten Funktion der Einrichtung Theater als einer Vergnügung...bleiben. Es ist die nobelste Funktion, die wir für 'Theater' gefunden haben...Nicht einmal

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* Bertolt Brecht, Schriften zum Theater , (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1973), p. 128.

zu lehren sollte ihm zugemutet werden,...Das Theater muss nämlich durchaus etwas Überflussiges bleiben dürfen (p.130-131).

He continues to explain that accuracy of imitation is not necessary so long as the inaccurate representation has a certain consistency. The driving ideological force behind the story, which can be created by poetic and theatrical means, is all that matters. For Brecht, as for Aristotle, the story or plot is the central point of the drama. Because the modern day audience can be satisfied by representations from so many periods, Brecht questions the audience's ability to recognize the characteristic expression of its own age. The audience understands the old works through empathy. What we appreciate in the old plays is merely their outer shell: the beauty of the language, the elegant narration, and colorful imaginative passages which form incidentals of the works. We no longer recognize the impact which the once-controversial content carried. Brecht quite simply sums up our problem: "Unsere ganze Art zu geniessen beginnt unzeitgemäss zu werden"(p.135).

He further argues that we have a different historical basis for our society than former generations because we live in an age of science when our lives are determined by scientific rather than divine laws. The specific historical situation, not invisible or uncontrollable forces, should determine man's reactions in that given situation. This is the Marxist viewpoint of history, that history is caused by men and not by superhuman powers. This means that the theater of the scientific age should be attuned to a scientifically explainable reality in order to give accurate representations of men and their activities. When it constructs analytical representations of society, it is then in a position to influence society. Brecht opposes an illusionary theater because it transforms the spectators into a hypnotized mass and arouses conditioned feelings without changing the emotions. The solution is a new kind of theater, the epic theater. An application of scientific principles in the theater would overcome the illusionary, mass-hypnotizing theater.

Brecht also calls for a historical theater in which plays are left in their original context so as to be scientifically analyzed. To achieve this, it must be made difficult for the spectator to identify with the actor. If the actor can alienate the spectator's emotional involvement he can appeal to the audience's intellectual and reasoning powers. Hence, the epic theater employs "Verfremdungseffekte" which Brecht defines as follows:

> Eine verfremdende Abbildung ist eine solche, die den Gegenstand zwar erkennen, ihn aber doch zugleich fremd erscheinen lässt (p.150).

Music, masks, and pantomine are among the more common alienation devices. In way of summary, Brecht concludes that plot, after all, is a key element to a play:

> Die Auslegung der Fabel und ihre Vermittlung durch geeignete Verfremdungen ist das Hauptgeschäft des Theaters(p.169).

The same year Brecht completed the "Kleines Organon"(1948), he went to East Berlin. Some time later, a theater, Theater am Schiffsbauerdamm, was placed at his disposal. After many difficulties, the Ministry of Popular Education offered him support to organize a theater group. The study of Marxist-Leninist teachings comprised part of the Ensemble's training and some of the staff studied at the Humboldt University devoting themselves to a more thorough understanding of dialectical materialism. New plays as well as old were approached analytically in a socio-historical way.

Brecht recorded the work of the Berliner Ensemble in a book called Theaterarbeit which gave an account of the company's productions from 1949 to 1951. It is a collection of essays, notes on plays, theory, and technique. Above all it is a record which shows how Brecht's theories worked out in practice. Theaterarbeit strongly stressed the practical application of ideas; it did not concern so much new ideas as making the old ones work. Articles with titles such as "Praxis und Theorie. Aus einem Brief an einen

Schauspieler"; "Gespräch mit dem Kostümgestalter und Maskenbildner"; "Modelle des Berliner Ensembles"; and "Projektionen" give an idea of the largely practical nature of the contents of Theaterarbeit. Little new theory was formulated in this collection and the theories he does mention have mellowed somewhat. He includes a glossary of terms he uses.[5]

In 1956 Brecht made a last collection of theoretical writings under the title "Die Dialektik auf dem Theater" which begins with the following statements:

> Die nachfolgenden Arbeiten, die dem Abschnitt 45. des "Kleinen Organon für das Theater" gewidmet wurden, legen die Vermutung nahe, dass die Bezeichnung 'episches Theater' für das gemeinte... Theater zu formal ist. Die Bezeichnung muss daher als unzureichend bezeichnet werden, ohne dass eine neue angeboten werden kann (p.174).

Brecht continually revised his dramatic theory up to the year of his death and this quotation shows his intention of presenting it under a new view called "dialectical theater". Most critics and writers agree that this new label "dialectical theater" causes more trouble than it is worth. Since Brecht never clearly defined the term in a coherent argument, critics have simply disregarded it. "Die Dialektik auf dem Theater" was as near as Brecht came to developing the idea he outlined in the appendices to the "Kleines Organon". In the last set of theoretical fragments, Brecht equates "narrating" events with a "dialecticizing" of them. The meaning of dialectical theater is so unclear and problematic that it could only be extensively dealt with in a separate study.

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[5] Bertolt Brecht, Theaterarbeit. 6 Aufführungen des Berliner Ensembles, (Berlin: Henschelverlag, 1961), second ed., p.453-456.

In the circle where he was known, Brecht remained a subject of controversy after his death in April 1956. The world of the theater inherited his seemingly contradictory theoretical writings - but that is all the more in character with the man, since he believed only through the presentation and analysis of contradictions lay hope for changing society. Brecht's theories affected drama in both East and West Germany in the 1950's. The dramatists in the West Germany were indebted to Brecht for the disruption of the illusionary theater that opened up new possibilities for dramatic experimentation in playwriting. Brecht's significance in East Germany lay more in his example of realizing a political theater, a theater that portrayed contradictions and conditioning elements in society with a proposal to change them.[6]

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[6] Thomas Koebner, "Dramatik und Dramaturgie seit 1945", *Tendenzen der deutschen Literatur seit 1945*, ed. Thomas Koebner, (Stuttgart: Kroner Verlag, 1971), p.377-379.

## 2. Dramatic theory of socialist realism

A discussion of Brecht and his theoretical writings easily leads to a comment on the dramatic theory of East German socialist drama. Literary critics in the West tend to gloss over or else simply ignore East German dramatic theory because of its political affiliations. Regardless of their intentional one-sided view, good plays are often written by East German dramatists and performed with success in the German Democratic Republic. Helmut Baierl's *Frau Flinz* (1969) and *Johanna von Döblin* (1969); Peter Hacks' *Schlacht bei Lobositz* (1959), *Die Sorgen und die Macht* (1960) and *Moritz Tassow* (1965); along with Heiner Müller's *Der Lohndrücker* (1958) are just a few of the better plays written in the DDR (Deutsche Demokratische Republik). *Senftenberger Erzählungen*, written by Hartmut Lange in 1960, was published in West Germany. But as of 1971, it had not yet been performed in the DDR. Two more plays by Lange, *Marski* and *Der Hundeprozess*, have been produced in the East.[7] Hence, one can hardly disregard the dramatists and the dramatic theory from the DDR.

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[7] One of the most complete and thorough studies on East German drama can be found in Konrad Franke's *Die Literatur der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik*, (München: Kindler Verlag, 1971), p.423-592.

"Socialist realism", the official dramatic theory of the socialist countries, was introduced in 1934 at a meeting of the Soviet League of Authors in Moscow.[8] The basic tenet of socialist realism formulated by Lenin and later reinforced by Ulbricht was that all cultural endeavors were to serve the building of the socialist state. Other experimental forms and theories were condemned. Since the party permits no other dramatic theory except socialist realism, examination of individual dramatists' theories is practically impossible. A complete definition of socialist realism is difficult to formulate because the theory combines political, aesthetic, and moral concepts. At the above-mentioned Moscow conference, writers were urged to present "a true and historical-concrete presentation of reality from the point of view of its revolutionary development".[9] The guidelines proposed by the party leaders for socialist realist drama remain nearly the same today. The worker in his environment is the central figure of the play. His difficulties and conflicts give substance to the dramatic action. The conflicts which arise are usually a result of the confrontation between remnants of the new socialist state and the old capitalistic system. Another leading character in a socialist play is usually a representative of the communist party such as a functionary, a higher official, or an officer. A vacillating, weak intellectual often stands as a foil to the hero and the communist party figure; the intellectual is either won over to the socialist way of thinking or is eliminated. Figures from the West are portrayed as villains and exploiters of the proletariat. So runs the model for many socialist plays.[10]

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[8] Margret Dietrich discusses the beginnings and development of socialist realism in the USSR, DDR, and other East European countries in _Das moderne Drama_, (Stuttgart: Kröner Verlag, 1961), p.531-557.

[9] Siegfried Melchinger, _The Concise Encyclopedia of Modern Drama_, (New York: Horizon Press, 1964), trans. by George Wellwarth, p.153.

Socialist realism also requires that the action take place in the country in which the dramatist lives, East Germany in this case. The Central Committee in 1951 recommended that drama should be based on real life experiences and observations. Only people who had lived in a foreign country could be justified in writing about it. The role of the individual has little significance outside the boundaries of the party in socialist drama as the attention shifts from an "I" to a "we". The individual is useless unless he belongs to a collective, since the ideals of the socialist state are revealed through the struggles and conflicts of the hero. Doubt and hesitation may plague him, but they may not be a central problem of the play. The hero's uncertainty arises from external circumstances rather than from inner conflicts. He finds the right solutions to the conflicts and the play ends happily. Although the hero is allowed to make mistakes, his errors are due to immaturity and impatience in over-zealous devotion to the socialist cause. Even the most contradictory ideas can be harmonized and eventually resolved in socialist plays so long as one applies Marxist teachings to the problems.[11]

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[10] Theodore Huebener, The Literature of East Germany, (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1970), p.9-10.

East and West Germany both experienced a tremendous influx of new plays in the post-war years. Germany was anxious to catch up with the outside world after twelve years of isolation and to see the plays which the Nazis had banned. The existential drama in France and plays by Beckett, Adamov, Ionesco, Anouilh, and Giraudoux; the English dramatists, T. S. Eliot and Christopher Fry, as well as plays by the American writers, Thorton Wilder, Eugene O'Neill, Tennessee Williams, and Arthur Miller were performed on the German stage and influenced West German playwriting for the first decade after the war.[12]

The DIP welcomed the plays as much as the West and performed them without state disapproval. It was only in 1950 that a stronger political pressure made itself noticeable in the theater world. Cultivation of the new socialist person emerged as the watchword in East German drama as the dramatists were advised to avoid western models and pattern their work after Soviet plays. Of the two systems of government in divided Germany, the German Democratic Republic offered more of an ideological foundation than the Federal Republic of Germany. At first, before a large experimental productivity began, the West German writers were stunned and bewildered in the aftermath of the war. The East German writers, however, had a definite direction. It is true that this direction was dictated by the state, but it offered a fresh, vigorous challenge to rebuild a devastated country. Besides, the East German writers decided not to be burdened with the problem of war guilt, unlike the West German authors, since the socialist government simply denied any responsibility for the Nazi regime. The war was a result of a capitalistic system and the East Germans were finally given a chance to build a new system of government. Regardless of the economic hardships the DDR suffered in its early years, socialist realism did provide the theater with a sense of direction and mission.

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[11] Heubener delineates the characteristic elements of socialist drama more extensively in his book *The Literature of East Germany*.

[12] See Dietrich for a more detailed study of foreign influences on German post-war drama. *Op. Cit.*

On several occasions, the party intervened in a theater's repertory or forbade a performance as it sought to tighten its control on cultural activities. In Dresden the SED (Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands, the Communist Party of East Germany) forced the removal of Carl Orff's Antigone from the program. In East Berlin Glinka's opera Ruslan and Ludmilla had to be altered to conform to the Soviet model before it was allowed to be given. Even Brecht was not immune to the party's meddling. His play Die Tage der Kommune which was due to premiere in 1951 was not permitted to be performed. The SED termed it "objektivistisch" and "defätistisch". Brecht also had to revise an opera, Das Verhör des Lukullus, to meet the demands of the party and had to give up his production of Die Mutter on which he was working at the time. In fact, only the Berliner Ensemble performed Brecht's plays because the Brechtian style did not fit the interpretation of socialist realism in the early 1950's.[13]

The tight control exerted over the literary output was achieved through conferences of authors and publishers, partly through the German Academy of the Arts, and through the Ministry of Culture. The degree of strictness in control varied. Since the beginning of the German Democratic Republic, three periods of liberalization are discernible. In the early fifties, the party tried to force socialist realism on all writers as the only acceptable norm. This plan met with only limited success and the party finally modified its demands. The years 1956-57 witnessed the second "thaw" period, as the party relaxed its censorship policies. In 1964 a party conference officially accepted the liberalization of 1956. Writers were urged to go into industry and agricultural communities to experience the people and their milieu so as to better present a realistic portrayal in literature. Likewise, the new policy encouraged workers to enter the professional writing field and relate their experiences in a literary medium.

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[13] The above discussion of the party's control on the theater is based on Heinz Kersten's "Theater und Politik", Theater hinter dem 'Eisernen Vorhang', (Basel: Basilius Presse, 1964), p.19-21.

Shorty after Stalin's death, the first liberalization of the interpretation of socialist realism occurred. Critics voiced protests against the varnishing-over of reality and the tendency to explain away inconsistencies in euphemistic cliches. A few plays criticizing party policy appeared such as Heinar Kippardt's Shakespeare dringend gesucht (1952). In his play, Kippardt ridiculed the political system which allowed so many mediocre plays to succeed just because they dealt with fashionable topics. The liberalization period soon ended and a harder party line was taken. This alternation between liberalization and curtailment has determined theater life in East Germany for the last twenty years. However, things are not quite as bleak as they appear to Western observers. Heinz Kersten in his essay on theater and politics in the DDR points out that a definite political doctrine can lead to first-rate artistic accomplishments as the Soviet revolution theater and the Piscator productions of the twenties and Brecht's Berliner Ensemble demonstrate.[14] The relationship between the theater and a political doctrine becomes problematic when political considerations take priority over artistic criteria. This is unfortunately all too often the case as dogmatic ideas are forced into a drama and artistic standards are pushed into the background.

Yet some dramatists escaped the rigid party surveillance by devoting their talents to translation and adaptations of plays. Hartmut Lange, for example, translated and revised Moliere's Tartuffe (1963) and Johnson's The Alchemist. Peter Hacks reworked Shakespeare's King John (1969) and Richard II (1968-69), as well as classical Greek material such as Aristophane's Peace and Amphitryon. By revising plays in a Marxist context, a dramatist can still employ his skill and at the same time avoid confrontation with the party over a original play. Comedy writing provides another alternative to the strict adherence to socialist realism. Since tragedy in the traditional Aristotelian sense is not permitted in socialist drama, writers mask their criticism of the political situation in comedies and farces. This may explain why some of the best film comedies come from the eastern socialist countries: they use the genre least likely to be criticized to portray the foibles of their world.[15]

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[14] Heinz Kersten, "Theater und Politik", Op. Cit., p. 15.

Many important East German dramatists are noticed in West Germany; in fact, several socialist dramatists have found favor in the West. The writers Hartmut Lange, Peter Hacks, Helmut Baierl, and Heiner Müller are recognized as talented, relatively independent writers. They have written articles and have given interviews which concern their plays as well as their ideas on dramatic theory. Moreover, these articles have appeared in both East and West German publications.

## 3. Peter Hacks: socialist classicism

Since the SED officially permits no other dramatic theory except socialist realism, examination of individual dramatists' theories is of little value. Nevertheless, a few dramatists have written essays and given interviews which deal with dramatic theory. Peter Hacks is one of the few playwright-theorists among the East German dramatists recognized by the West. Since Hacks writes more extensively on dramatic theory, some of his ideas will be examined to give an example of an individual interpretation of socialist realism.

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[15] Ernst Wendt gives a more detailed discussion of these methods of "Flucht" in "Dramatik in Osten", Deutsche Dramatik in West und Ost, (Velber bei Hannover: Friedrich Verlag, 1965), p.78-79.

Despite the fact that most of the emigration traffic between the German Democratic Republic and the German Federal Republic flowed westward, Peter Hacks chose the eastward route and settled in East Berlin in 1955. He entered the country just on the eve of the second thaw when the party's attitude toward censorship loosened up. The years 1956 and 1957 were proclaimed as part of the "Übergangsperiode", a time of transition from the old bourgeois system to the new socialist state. Hacks had already written one theoretical essay in 1954 titled "Wider den ästhetischen Ennui", in which he defended the necessity of content in a work of art. He concluded that "der Inhalt wird zum Meister" as form is subjugated to the play's meaning.[16] In the second part of this important article, he discusses content and form in art and the role of art and the artist in society. Whereas his first essay dealt more with aesthetics than with dramatic theory, his theoretical writing during the later 1950's specifically concerns drama.

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[16] Peter Hacks, "Wider den ästhetischen Ennui. Oder: Beweis, dass ein Kunstwerk einen Inhalt haben müsse", Frankfurter Hefte, 8(1954), p.590.

Hacks' presentation style should be mentioned first before continuing an examination of his theory. He approaches dramatic theory in a similar way to Brecht, although the younger Hacks tends more toward a philosophical discourse. Both state their ideas with a directness and certainty which give their theoretical statements a strongly didactic characteristic. He sets up his articles so methodically that they resemble a form exercise in logic. Most of his essays begin with a preliminary remark in which he states the purpose of the article. The main body usually consists of two or more topics subdivided into numbered points. If he diverges from the subject, Hacks notes the approaching divergence with the heading "Excurs". Hacks' theoretical writing is clear and easy to follow. He defines the terms he uses and includes examples of his ideas.

In this early article, Peter Hacks sets down tenets on which he bases his later dramatic theory. In "Wider den ästhetischen Ennui", he remains very faithful to the party line as he rejects formalism as a method of literary criticism. Formalism, a Russian school of criticism which flourished between 1915 and 1930, relied heavily on analysis of form. Hence, rhythm, rhyme and style were often studied to the exclusion of content. The Marxist-Leninist literary theorists condemned formalism because they saw it as a denial of history and society. Hacks supports this view as he argues for the necessity and eventually the supremacy of content. Hacks explains that the formalists gradually realized that excellence could not be achieved through form alone, that form needed enrichment through content. Even in the context of the "enrichment theory", content was still without value, for it existed solely for the sake of form. Content comes into its own right, Hacks explains, when art is judged "historically", instead of "critically". The critical approach judges art for art's sake and leads to formalism. A work of art is judged independently from the society in which it was created. Of course, the critical approach does not represent socialist policy. Hacks concludes that content is necessary and more important than form because it has a direct relationship to society. It is an inescapable fact that an artist is a member of society and he creates or produces according to the likes and interests of his particular society. Once an artist loses contact with his society, his work becomes sterile and ineffective. Hacks does not directly condemn formalism, but points out its deficiencies:

> Aber das Genügen an der blossen vollkommenen Form ist ein armselgier allerletzter Abglanz der Erfüllung, die das vollkommene Leben geben sollte, eine Scheingenugsamkeit, ein sich Wärmen am Mond(p.593).

In 1956 Hacks' second article on dramatic theory appeared. It had as its goal: "die primären Merkmale des dramatischen Stils von heute aufzuzählen, Versuch einer Minimaldefinition".[17] Hacks wants to state the obvious about socialist realistic theory in his article. He comments on several of the topics listed in the table of contents, questions which also concern western dramatists. Since he explains them within a socialist context, the definitions and answers have already been established. He begins with generalities of socialist realism, then comments on form, dialog, plot, tragedy and characters.

Socialist realism calls for progressive drama. Hacks states: "das forschrittliche Theaterstück ist rationalistisch und plebejisch"(p.119). He devotes much time to the definition of these two adjectives.[18] He explains that socialist drama needs both a rationalistic and a plebeian attribute. The lack of one of them disqualifies the play as progressive in the socialist sense. Progress made in the proletarian class is the subject of socialist drama. The ideology behind the progress is reason. Hacks states his first "Gemeinplatz" of socialist drama: a socialist play must take a rationalistic as well as a plebeian approach to society.

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[17] Peter Hacks, "Einige Gemeinplätze über das Stückeschreiben", Neue deutsche Literatur, 9(1956), p. 119. All subsequent quotations from this source will be indicated with page number in parentheses.

[18] Hacks defines the two characteristics of a socialist realistic play as follows: "Die Geisteshaltung von konsequent ihrer gesellschaftlichen Lage gemäss handlenden Unteren beliebiger Art nennt man spätestens seit Hans Mayer, plebejisch. Die Geisteshaltung der Vernünftigen, also derer, die die Welt nicht als vernünftig, sondern als erklarbar ansehen, nennt man rationalistisch"(p.119).

His second statement is that socialist drama should have form. He chides the dramatists who wrote plays proclaiming the attainment of the socialist state. In reality, the transition is being made to socialism and discrepancies between the old and the new systems have not yet been overcome. The proper form of socialist drama for the transition period must show the meaning and significance of the contradictions, for example, the discrepancies between the socialist economic system and remnants of the old capitalistic one(p.121). Hacks ends his comment on form by calling socialist realism a poetical realism. From the sense of this brief passage, one is given the impression that dramatic form will be unnecessary once the socialist state is perfected. Hacks, however, warns:

> Eine Vernachlässigung der Form, eine Formlosigkeit oder Formfeindschaft entsprechen nicht dem Stand unserer gesellschaftlichen Erkenntnis(p.121).

This statement does not contradict socialist literary policy which condemns formalism, but tempers it by showing the need for form as well as content. One can not be abandoned solely in preference for the other.

In the section "Über realistischen Dialog", Hacks encourages a dialog free of superfluous words and one that comes directly to the point. He advises the dramatist to write rationally and concisely:

> Demnach muss er den Dialog rational durchtränken, indem er jede unkritische Allerweltsformulierung meidet, vor allem Alltagsgeschwätz zurückscheut und überhaupt kein Wort duldet, das nicht streng zur Situation gehörig(p.121).

This prescribes a type of well-made play in the socialist sense, with its tightly constructed plot and terse dialog. In addition to a succinct dialog, a socialist realist drama requires a definite plot. The plot should portray the alterable dependency of characters and conditions on each other, but more important, that society can be altered. The plot should instill a will in the audience to take action. Above all, the proletarian component remains the supreme aspect in the plot of a socialist realist play. Hacks defines "proletarian" as "ein ausgeprägtes Wirklichkeitsbewusstsein, eine verändernde und also vertraute Beziehung zur stofflichen und gesellschaftlichen Realität"(p,122-123). Hence, a proletarian approach implies an acknowledgment of reality, a recognition of the imperfections in a society, along with the a positive attitude that emphasizes the possibility for change.

Hacks' remarks on tragedy and comedy closely conform to the socialist realist theory on the two genres. A tragedy is a portrayal of a conflict which necessarily ends fatally for the hero. Hacks defines a conflict as a contradiction of two justified demands which are "mutually" exclusive(p.123). Since these kinds of conflicts still exist and tragic situations inevitably arise, what has been abolished in the tragic portrayal? Hacks answers that socialist realism no longer accepts the deification of one of the conflicts. Marxism sees the insolubility of conflicts as a temporary state. Fate or eternal laws no longer play a role in man's affairs.

Socialist drama should not concern biological drives or pyschological conflicts of characters, for the more personal traits a character shows on stage, the less important he is to society, and hence to theater. Furthermore, Hacks states that an unalterable character interests no one and is useless to art:

> Kunstfähig ist allein ein Charakterzug, der Ursachen hat und also...mit den Ursachen verbessert werden kann(p.125).

The focus on the individual and his personal life as opposed to the individual's worth in society forms one of the basic differences between Marixist and non-Marxist drama. Both sides usually agree that man is the central theme of art. The non-Marxists argue that man must solve internal conflicts; i.e., man must come to terms with himself before he can efficiently contribute to society. The Marxist ideology strives to first reconcile man to the outer world, to society, and then man will automatically be able to resolve inner problems. In my opinion, neither side has the correct solution. A synthesis of the two, a precarious balance between outer and inner reconciliation usually achieves the most satisfactory result.

Hacks stated some indisputable maxims in his 1956 article, but he raised questions to be contested in his essay "Das realistische Theaterstück", which he wrote a year later. He discusses problems in socialist dramatic theory which he regards as topical and open-ended. He submits "eine anmassliche Konvergenztheorie, welche behauptet, dass fast alles bisher dagewesene in dem realistischen Theaterstück seinen Gipfel zugleich und sein Ende finde".[19] He reminds the reader that he is writing about something uncertain and indefinite, about questions which he considers still unanswered in socialist realism. Therefore, he will not give answers, but will raise questions. From this beginning, it is not at all surprising to learn that his article created much controversy.[20] One of the objections raised against the essay was the indefinite nature of Hacks' proposals. They were regarded as signs of doubt and vacillation - traits which a Marxist dramatist or theorist should never show.

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[19] Peter Hacks, "das realistische Theaterstück", Neue Deutsche Literatur, 10(1957), p.90. Page numbers from his article indicated in parentheses.

[20] See "Kritische Bemerkungen zu einigen Kunsttheorien Peter Hacks'" and "An einige Aristoteliker" discussed later in this chapter.

In "Das realistische Theaterstuck", Hacks writes in a more complex style than he did in his earlier essays. He begins by explaining how realistic art contains the general in the particular. He repeats his earlier statements about the uselessness of individual character portrayal in drama when it has no social application. His comments on the topical play differ from the party line which encourages drama on topical events: "Ein Zeitstück ist keine Utopie im Gewande von 1957" (p.97). Nor does Hacks think that a portrayal of utopias in other historical settings is valid. The future already exists in the present as a tendency, Hacks concludes. I find this observation significant to the theory of socialist realism because it implies that changes which are made in the present invariably effect the future. Granted, this is a trivial statement, but one which is often overlooked. To best realize socialist goals, dramatists should portray the present conditions and changes which can be made now to alter the future. Hacks suggests that tendencies in society which point to the future should be stressed rather than an ideal situation in the future. The general of the future turns out to be the old, abstract ideas of the past. For that reason, drama of socialist realism should concentrate on present tendencies.

Hacks proceeds to comment on realism in the theater. Realism portrays society in reality, it portrays reality dialectically or subject to logical argumentation. When the audience recognizes the logical causes of conditions, it feels the need to act. As in "Einige Gemeinplätze über das Stückeschreiben", Hacks again discusses the genre of tragedy and comedy. The dialectical nature of reality removes the separation between the comic and the tragic. A realistic play is not realistic just because it mixes tragic and happy elements, but because it shows the transient nature of each state. Again, the goal of the realistic theater is to give insight into the imperfections in society. At this point, Hacks sounds very much like Brecht:

> Aber weder Lachen noch Weinen ist die beabsichtigte Hauptwirkung des realistischen Theaters, sondern die mit Einsicht gepaarte Erregung über das Leben: das Vergnugen an der Einsicht und die aus der Erregung folgende Aktivität(p.96).

The already familiar idea that learning can be pleasurable was proposed by Brecht as the goal of his Lehrstücke. Hacks adds a new twist, however. One should be stimulated and excited enough to act, presumably to make changes and decisions in favor of the socialist state. The dramatist has a key role in realistic theater because the dialog he gives the actors reveals his attitude toward the world. To avoid any misunderstandings, he should use a realistic writing style which is "klar, anständig, kommunikativ"(p.98). Hacks resumes a discussion of the plebeian attitude which he introduced in the previous essay and defined as the appropriate one for our century. He traces the history of the plebian hero and his behavior in literature and cites the advantage of this position over the proletarian one:

> Zum andern aber, und vor allem, hat die Tschandala-Position, die Position des isolierten Ganz-Unten, eine Möglichkeit, die die proletarische Position nicht hat: die Möglichkeit zur fundamentalen Kritik, die Möglichkeit zur radikalen Malice gegen alles, die zur radikalen Objektivität führt(p.100).

Hacks correctly points out that this type of criticism is unproductive and asocial. Nevertheless, he still defends it as a counterbalance against idealistic digressions.

Along with a historical account of the plebeian tradition, Hacks maintains that the plebeian language was formerly the only realistic speech in literature. It was supposed to be poetic and vigorous. Today, Hacks believes that "Hochdeutsch ist die proletarische Volksprache"(p.100). Dialects are out, "Hochdeutsch" is the language of the modern socialist drama. The proletarian folk play is the model for present-day realistic theater. It should incorporate all the virtues of the folk play but on the level of twentieth-century awareness. Hacks means that a social quality should be introduced. Scientific dialectic replaces the folklore and folk wisdom. A synthesis between folk style and the high classical style is the aim. Hacks defends the viewpoint that the positive hero should have no grave faults on the basis that discrepancies - the true object of a play - are necessary. Faults are merely extra. A positive hero should not have accidental faults, because it would detract from the central concern of the play, the "Widersprüchlichkeit der Welt". Hacks again emphasizes the artistic insignificance of personal conflicts. It is especially important that the positive hero show certainty in his actions. He describes the ideal hero of socialist realistic drama:

> Er hat die typischen Widersprüche seiner Gesellschaft, und er steht in den typischen widersprüchlichen Situationen seiner Zeit (p. 104).

Thus Peter Hacks ends his essay. He thoroughly investigated several tenets of the socialist realistic play and raised many questions. These two essays created much controversy and were subjected to a considerable amount of criticism. One example of an article written in response to Hacks' dramatic theory is "Kritische Bemerkungen zu einigen Kunsttheorien Peter Hacks'" written by three university students in their fifth year.[21] They accuse Hacks of using an unhistorical method of approach and of talking too idealistically and abstractly(p.20). One of the recurring objections throughout the critical essay is Hacks' misuse of Marxist terminology. Hacks' terms are supposedly Hegelian rather than Marxist. Bahro, Doring, and Mulhberg did not at all care for Hacks' ideas on the plebian tradition. Their collective opinion is:

> Der plebejische Held ist eine Fiktion von Peter Hacks, und die plebejische Position könnte nur da künsterlisch bedeutsam werden, wo sie über sich hinauswächst...(p.30).

They conclude that this is not possible due to the nature of the plebeian position. The three authors deny the existence of a plebeian tradition in the sense that Hacks presents it. It seems their main objection is that the plebian heritage does not do full justice to the evolution of socialist art. It is unworthy to socialist art to claim it had its beginnings in the picaresque and plebeian positions of the past; socialist art should be shown to have origins in all the great art movements and forms of the past.

"Kritische Bemerkungen" offers a typical example of the type of criticism an author encounters under the party's interpretation of socialist realism. The practice of collective interviews and team authorships is particularly irritating. One feels that the interviewed or criticized person is so outnumbered that he has little chance to defend himself. A collective committee often revises plays to such a degree that the author hardly recognizes his own work. An inherent danger in committees is the lack of a leader to assume responsibility. Whom does Hacks directly answer if he wants to defend himself?

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[21] Rudolph Bahro, Ulrich Döring, Hedi Mühlberg, "Kritische Bemerkungen zu einigen Kunsttheorien Peter Hacks'", Theater der Zeit, 12(1958), Beilage. References to this article indicated by page numbers in parentheses.

Hacks does not helplessly stand on the side. He too writes critical articles on plays and books and defends his theoretical ideas.[22] After 1960 he devoted more time to writing and adapting plays. It seems the vacillating and constant critical attitude of the party finally discouraged Hacks from further theorizing. Much of the criticism directed against Hacks' theory concerns his neglect to emphasize the necessary "Parteilichkeit" of literature. This is an unjust criticism, since Hacks clearly calls for what he terms "Politdramaturgie":

> Politdramaturgie ist nicht Dramaturgie im bornierten

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[22] Hacks severely criticizes Gerhard Zwerenz's book *Aristotelische und Brechtsche Dramatik* in the article "Aristoteles, Brecht oder Zwerenz?" *Theater der Zeit*, 3(1957). Other reviews by Hacks are "Tätig für Felde und Feste", *Theater heute*, 6(1965), and "Über Körtners Inszenierung der Lysistrate"(1962).

> Sinne, sondern Dramaturgie auf gesellschaftlichen Einsichten basierend, dialektische Dramaturgie.[23]

Hacks continually stresses in all his theoretical writing the need for a theater of the present day: "Theater von gestern, heute gespielt, ist nichtexistentes Theater".[24] He even goes so far to say that the socialist theater of Brecht no longer exists. Hacks proposes that the "Theaterstück von morgen ist das klassische Drama".[25]

After almost ten years of theorizing, Hacks decides to settle on classical socialist drama as the ideal form. The topical play is too quickly outdated whereas the classical play on the one hand is eternal and on the other, relevant only to a particular stage of socialist development. The "Weltbild" of the classical play agrees with the goals of its audience and originates from a nation's folk tradition. Hacks considered his own plays before 1960 to be "revolutionäre Tendenzstücke" and not representative of "sozialistischer Klassik".[26]

As previously stated, Hacks has written less on theory in recent years. It is not his fault that the cultural officials and literary critics of the German Democratic Republic misinterpret or misunderstand his maxims on socialist theater because of ideological reasons. I think Hacks remains one of the most important theorists of contemporary socialist drama.

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[23] Peter Hacks, "Bitte nicht erschrecken: Politdramaturgie", *Neue deutsche Literatur*, 11(1956), p.6.
[24] "Bitte nicht erschrecken: Politdramaturgie", p.6.
[25] Konrad Franke, *Die Literatur der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik*, (München: Kindler Verlag, 1971), p. 495.
[26] *Ibid*.

# CHAPTER II

# THE DRAMATIST

## 1. Motivation for playwriting

An appropriate starting point for a discussion of the dramatic theory of dramatists is the dramatist himself, because his motivations for writing often determine his theory. Writing, and playwriting in particular, is known for its meager economic returns. In a Theater heute interview two years ago, thirteen dramatists were asked if they could make a living from playwriting.[1] Only three answered an unconditional "yes", six replied "no", and the others answered that it depended on other things, if the play was televised, for example. One concludes from this interview that making money is rarely a reason for writing plays.

Nor do dramatists often achieve instant success. They must work under uncertain conditions and if they have talent and luck, they may succeed. Despite the insecure and difficult life of a playwright, people continue to write plays. This chapter examines dramatists' motivations for playwriting in the hope that an examination of the dramatist's attitude toward writing could lend insight into the nature of his dramatic theory. Whether or not a dramatist recognizes and accepts responsibility for what he writes reflects his attitude toward society and his role in it. A dramatist may deny any responsibility for his writing, yet contradict this stand in his work. A case in point is Friedrich Dürrenmatt, who often tends to do this in his plays. Or just the opposite may occur, as shown in Günter Grass' play, *Die Plebejer proben den Aufstand*, based on Brecht, who reneged on the application of his theory and refused to support the Berlin workers' uprising in 1953. By first viewing the dramatist, an orientation base on which to measure his later dramatic statements can be established.

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[1] "Dramatiker Umfrage: Können Sie vom Stückeschreiben leben?", Theater heute, Sonderheft(1972), p.84.

Friedrich Dürrenmatt, a Swiss writer, is one of the most famous post-war dramatists known to the non-German speaking world. He began writing plays in the early 1940's and has since then written and revised over two dozen dramas and radio plays. Dürrenmatt's plays include *Der Blinde* (1948); *Romulus der Grosse* (1949); *Die Ehe des Herrn Mississippi* (1952); *Ein Engel kommt nach Babylon* (1953); *Der Besuch der alten Dame* (1956); *Frank der Fünfte* (1959); *Die*

*Physiker* (1959); *Der Meteor* (1966); *Porträt eines Planeten* (1970); and his most recent play, *Der Mitmacher*. His first play, *Es steht geschrieben* (1947), appeared in a new version in 1967 under the title *Die Wiedertäufer*. Except for the play *Der Blinde*, Dürrenmatt has revised most of his early plays in some way. He also writes detective stories and novels but considers himself primarily a dramatist. His writings on dramatic theory, the bulk of which appears in a collection of essays and speeches, are called *Theater-Schriften und Reden*. The essay "Theaterprobleme", delivered on a lecture tour in the fall of 1954 and the spring of 1955, has become Dürrenmatt's best-known theoretical writing. In this particular essay Dürrenmatt states his reasons for writing plays:

> Entscheidend dabei ist, dass mit der Bühne gedichtet wird, um Max Frisch zu zitieren, eine Möglichkeit, die mich seit jeher beschäftigt und die einer der Grunde, wenn nicht der Hauptgrund ist, warum ich Theaterstücke schreibe.[2]

"Lesedramen", or closet plays intended only for reading and not for performance, do not interest Dürrenmatt. He wants to work with the stage and its possibilities. In a preface to one of his plays, Dürrenmatt explains his motives more specifically:

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[2] Friedrich Dürrenmatt, "Theaterprobleme", *Theater-Schriften und Reden*, (Zürich: Die Arche Verlag, 1966), p. 105.

> Der Ursprung jeder Dramatik liegt vorerst im Trieb, Theater möglich zu machen, auf der Bühne zu zaubern, mit der Bühne zu spielen. Theater is eine Angelegenheit der schöpferischen Lebensfreude, der unmittelbarsten Lebenskraft.[3]

Dürrenmatt writes out of the need to produce theater. This "Trieb" to make poetry with the stage implies that Dürrenmatt regards the stage as a tool, a mate, with whom he can create life. He equates his need to write with basic human drives; the urge to write is for him a joy of creative life. Dürrenmatt further states that an author is neither a cynic or a moralist, nor does he gives his person, his belief, or his conviction for discussion, although he knows that they play a role in his writing.[4] Dürrenmatt scoffs at the idea of the "craft of playwriting", which purports that anyone who makes a diligent effort to achieve something in the arts will achieve it.[5] He thinks that a craft of playwriting is nonexistent, it is just a question of the mastery of the material using language and stage.

Another playwright who gives similar reasons for writing is Max Frisch, a fellow-countryman of Dürrenmatt.

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[3] Friedrich Dürrenmatt, "Standortbestimmung zu 'Frank V.'", Theater-Schriften und Reden, p. 189.
[4] "Standortbestimmung zu 'Frank V.'", p.189.
[5] "Theaterprobleme", p. 115.

Frisch has written novels, almost a dozen plays, and several essays on dramatic theory. Frisch's dramas are _Nun singen wir wieder_ (1945); _Die chinesische Mauer_ (1946); _Als der Krieg zu Ende war_ (1947/48); _Graf Öderland_ (1949); _Don Juan oder die Liebe zur Geometrie_ (1953); _Biedermann und die Brandstifter_ (1957); _Die grosse Wut des Philipp Hötz_ (1958); _Andorra_ (1961); and _Biographie_ (1967). In reply to the question of why he writes, Frisch replies:

> Ich möchte antworten: aus Trieb, aus Spieltrieb, aus Lust. Ferner aus Eitelkeit;...Aber das reicht nicht für eine Lebensarbeit;...Also ich schreibe aus Bedürfnissen nicht der Gesellschaft, sondern meiner Person.*

In the same article, Frisch compares himself to the cavemen who painted their world on the walls of their caves out of a need to communicate. He suggests that the desire to establish contact and communicate with others motivated the most primitive of artists and writers. Although Frisch is tempted to say he writes just for the fun of writing, he acknowledges a deeper driving force behind his work. Writing is his way of letting people know what he thinks and how he perceives the world. Frisch is motivated to write because it fulfills a personal need to establish contact with other people.

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* Max Frisch, "Der Autor und das Theater"(1964), _Öffentlichkeit als Partner_, (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1967), p.83-84.

By the age of 29, the Austrian dramatist Peter Handke had written eight theater plays, three novels, short stories, and essays. So far, Handke has written *Weissagung* (1964); *Selbstbezichtigung* (1965); *Publikumsbeschimpfung* (1966); *Kaspar* (1968); *Hilferufe* (1967); *Der Mündel will Vormund sein* (1969); and *Quodlibet* (1970). His most recent play is *Der Unvernünftigen sterben aus*. These accomplishments have made him into a sort of "Wunderkind" in the theater world. Furthermore, Handke has very definite reasons for writing, which he cites in his essay "Ich bin ein Bewohner eines Elfenbeinturms":

> Es interessiert mich als Autor übrigens gar nicht, die Wirklichkeit zu zeigen oder zu bewältigen, sondern es geht mir darum, meine Wirklichkeit zu zeigen (wenn auch nicht zu bewältigen)...ich habe nur ein Thema: Über mich selbst klar, klarer zu werden, mich kennenzulernen oder nicht kennenzulernen...damit ich mich mit anderen besser verständigen und mit ihnen besser umgehen kann.[7]

Whereas Dürrenmatt writes out of a creative drive and Frisch out of a need to communicate, Handke writes primarily to gain knowledge of himself and others. Handke reasons that once he understands himself, and why he reacts and thinks in certain ways, he can better cope with others. Writing for Handke is also an expression of his world, of his own reality. Like Frisch, who also explained a need to communicate, Handke seeks to express himself and his world through writing. A danger exists when one writes only for self-expression. Motivation of this kind can lead to a dead end, because it has no connecting link to the outside world or beyond the individual. If a dramatist so insistently stresses his own reality, the impact of his dramatic theory is lessened, since a play is valid in his scheme only when it realizes his reality. Handke avoids this danger by explaining that he writes not only to express himself, but to understand himself and others. Thus, an exchange or conversation is set up between author and spectator.

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[7] Peter Handke, "Ich bin ein Bewohner eines Elfenbeinturms" (1967), *Prosa Gedichte Theaterstücke Hörspiel Aufsätze*, (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1969), p.270. This title will be abbreviated *Prosa/Aufsätze* in future references.

When Artur Joseph asked Martin Walser why he wrote, Walser answered that writing was neith[illegible] attack upon society nor pure pleasure, but a defe[illegible]gainst everything imaginable. Growing old means a continual deprivation process and writing guards against this.* Again the desire to create something permanent in an impermanent world seems to prompt such an idea. Walser may have made this statement with a tongue-in-cheek attitude because it appears nowhere else as a central point in his writings; but statements referring to writing as a means to express his "Bewusstsein" do occur. Walser began his writing career as a novelist but turned to playwriting because he discovered that some themes better lent themselves to treatment in dialog rather than in prose. He found the novel better suited for subjective matters and drama for public or political topics. He later changed his idea that theater should pursue only political discussions and realized that he should keep his plays closer to his own "Bewusstsein".

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* Artur Joseph, Theater unter vier Augen. Gespräche mit Prominenten, (Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1969), p.61-62.

The word "Bewusstsein" translates as consciousness, knowledge, or conviction. However, none of these English words transmit to the fullest extent what the German word implies, for "Bewusstsein" combines all three and suggests the way a society thinks and feels. For that reason, "Bewusstsein", when mentioned in other references to theoretical texts, will be left in the German.

Walser sees writing as a means to express the contemporary moral, social, and political consciousness of society as well as his own "Bewusstsein". Writing provides the opportunity to describe the difficulties of a "Bewusstsein" and the chance to come to terms with it.*

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* "Interview mit Martin Walser", *Neue deutsche Literatur*, Bd. 13,(1965), pt. 2. p.102-103.

Walser explains why he has chosen the stage to examine society's conscience:

> Und es gibt keinen öffentlichen Ort ausser der Bühne, wo es (das Bewusstsein) sich zeigen darf. Und die Öffentlichkeit ist dem Bewusstsein wichtig. Das Bewusstsein braucht Gesellschaft oder es wird krank.[10]

Walser proposes to keep the individual's "Bewusstsein" healthy by putting it on stage for examination in the context of society's "Bewusstsein". By showing what attitudes exist in society, an individual can decide whether he should re-examine his values or society should change it's attitudes.

In an interview about a recent play, Walser elaborates on what writing means to him:

> ...aber das Stück ist ja, wie die anderen auch, ein Experiment, das man anstellt, um sich klar zu werden.[11]

If Walser regards a play as an experiment, he must consider the writing of it as a learning process. He begins with a premise, works it out in writing, and tests its validity with the finished product. The idea of writing a play as an experiment and as an expression of the "Bewusstsein" results in a rather thorough self-examination for the writer and society.

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[10] Martin Walser, "Ein weiterer Tagtraum vom Theater"(1967), Heimatkunde. Aufsätze und Reden, (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1972), p.84.

[11] Martin Walser, "Abschied von der Politik", Theater heute, 9(1967), p.7.

Richard Hey also compares himself to a scientist in an address he submitted to the Conference of German Dramaturgists in 1959.[12] Hey says that, like a scientist, he writes only about things of which he is uncertain. Like a scientist, he forms a hypothesis and then tests it. Only after the experiment does he learn whether or not his suspicions were true. He describes his work method as "eine Einkreisung und Abgrenzung des Ungefähren, des Einfalls, der Ideen"(p.245). Hey and Walser are essentially saying that they have no ideology nor philosophy on which they base a play. They take an idea and narrow it down until it is pressed into a form for a play. When Hey says he writes about unknown or uncertain things, he could mean ideas which he tests out in play form. If the ideas work, then he knows a play can be successfully written with those ideas. Once he knows one idea works, he tries a different approach or new idea for another play.

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[12] Richard Hey "Schreiben fürs Theater", Theater im Gespräch, Friedrich Schültze et al., (München: A. Langen - G. Müller, 1963), p.245-248. The following discussion on Hey is based on this article. Quotations and ideas from this source will be indicated by page numbers in parentheses.

After discussing his semblance to a scientist, Hey gives his reasons for writing plays:

> Ich habe keine andere Antwort als die alte, unbefriedigende: ich weiss es nicht. Ich könnte auch sagen - und habe es schon gesagt: Es macht mir Vergnügen. Oder: Wer weiss, warum er liebt, liebt nicht mehr. Oder ähnlich wie Dürrenmatt es ausdruckte: Es ist meine Art, auf die Welt zu reagieren. Dialoge, so schien mir, transportierten mich sicherer dorthin, wohin ich wollte, nicht Beschreibung, sondern Chiffre fur Spiel, Aktion, Leben überhaupt. Dann das Optische, das Leibhafte, das Rythmische, kurzum das Theatralische, wie es Frisch formuliert: Zusammentreffen mit der Wirklichkeit (was auf der Bühne zu sehen ist) mit dem Imaginären (was von der Sprache hervorgerufen wird) (p.248).

Among the several reasons Hey cites for writing, making money is not included. He makes this clear right from the beginning of his list of reasons:

> Selbst Theaterautoren, die für unsere Verhältnisse recht erfolgreich sind, können kaum von ihren Theatereinnahmen leben (p.248).

At first, Hey hesitates to give a definite reason for writing. He is not certain why he writes except that writing is enjoyable. It also offers a way to respond to the world about him. But more important, dramatic dialog provides him with the most effective medium to reach his goal, which is to create "Chiffren" or codes for life. Hey's goals for drama will be discussed more thoroughly in the fourth and fifth chapters. It suffices for the present that playwriting enables him to best reach his goals.

Most of the dramatists have reasons for writing specifically for the stage. When Hey says that the stage is the best medium to unite the real with the imaginary(p.248), he sums up the essence of theater. For centuries, the space we call a stage has captured and expressed people's fantasies. This encounter with the real and the imaginary has been described and defined with various terms (Walser would probably call it a further expression of the "Bewusstsein"), but regardless of the name, the process is always the same - the inter-relationship of a make-believe world to a real one.

So far, the reasons for writing plays have been on a personal, psychological, or in Hey's case, metaphysical level. Yet not all reasons for playwriting are either abstract or personal. As pointed out in the last chapter, politics has been the major reason for playwriting in the socialist countries. Several western dramatists are also highly motivated by strong political convictions. Rolf Hochhuth and Peter Weiss, two of the better known political dramatists in West Germany, write political, and hence often controversial, plays. Peter Weiss began writing plays relatively late in his career. He formerly worked as a novelist, painter, and film-maker. As an ardent socialist, Weiss says that the theater should bring about social change.[13] Except for Brecht's work, Weiss formerly thought that theater was so stagnated and mired in tradition that its impact on society was lost. Gradually Weiss decided that theater was still possible and could be effective in present-day society. The success of his play *Marat/Sade* in 1964 confirmed this decision to devote his talent to playwriting. He now writes out of the belief that his work can change society:

> Ich glaube nicht, dass es genügt, einfach zu schreiben; es genügt nicht, über meinen persönlichen Kram zu schreiben. Ich meine, man sollte gar nicht anders schreiben als mit der Absicht, die Gesellschaft zu beeinflussen oder zu ändern.[14]

On the same page, Weiss expresses his lack of understanding of talented writers who still put marriage problems on the stage when so many pressing political problems demand attention.

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[13] "Gespräch mit Peter Weiss", *Sinn und Form*, (1965), p.684.

[14] This declaration appears in practically every interview and article Weiss has given or written. In *Theater unter vier Augen*, Weiss talks at length against the "Theater der Individualkonflikte". see Artur Joseph, *Theater unter vier Augen*, p. 64.

## 2. Tasks and responsibilities of the dramatist

The last statement overlaps, or rather leads to, the second concern of this chapter: What tasks and responsibilities does a dramatist have? Weiss on the one hand assigns grave responsibility to a dramatist; especially one who has committed himself politically. According to Weiss, once an author has used a stage to speak to an audience, he is automatically politically engaged. Moreover, if a dramatist keeps silent about truth and reality, he deceives more on stage than in a novel.[15] Weiss maintains that theater requires an author to take a stand politically and to express himself in his plays with all clarity. Apparently more dramatists were willing to express an opinion on the question concerning the tasks and responsibilities of the dramatist than to reveal their motives for writing - a fact which is not really too surprising, since writers often prefer to incorporate their motivations in their choice of themes. Whereas self-knowledge, self-expression, response to society, or political beliefs, were reasons given by the writers who talked about their motivation, twice as many dramatists commented on the second question. Max Frisch holds some definite views on the dramatist's task. Frisch himself poses the questions of whether a dramatist should try to shape society and whether he is responsible to society for the ideas he proposes. As if directly answering Weiss' assertion that every dramatist whose plays are performed is politically engaged, Frisch writes:

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[15] Theater unter vier Augen, p.64.

> Aber zu meinen, der Schriftsteller mache Politik, indem er sich ausspricht zur Politik ware eine Selbsttäuschung.[16]

Frisch thinks that the reason for writing plays, whether it be a desire to change society or a need for self-expression, is a personal one which each dramatist must work out for himself(p.82). Just because a dramatist writes politically, it does not necessarily follow that he is engaging in politics with the aim of changing society. Frisch suggests that political engagement may be a result rather than a stimulus in playwriting. He questions the dramatist's motivation for political engagement. Is the dramatist genuinely concerned with changing society or does political engagement simply provide him with a greater range of possibilities for plays? Frisch indicates that the latter reason is the real one for writers' engaged stands(p.79), although Frisch admits that engagement in politics is helpful for productive work. He does not object to writers engaging in political activities, but he dislikes the habit writers have developed of endorsing popular issues only to return to their comfortable desks leaving the tedious realization of the proposed solutions to others. Frisch questions the morality of this kind of political involvement:

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[16] Max Frisch, "Der Autor und das Theater", *Öffentlichkeit als Partner*, p.82. Subsequent quotations and ideas from this source will be indicated by page numbers in parentheses.

> Bin ich dadurch, dass ich mich von anderen Mitbürgern auszeichne am Schreibtisch, berufen oder auch nur befugt, Staatsmännern schreibend die Aufgabe zu stellen, der ich mich dann selbst entziehe?(p.81)

Frisch answers the question of whether or not the dramatist has a responsibility to society for his work with a cautious "no".

> Eine Verantwortung des Schriftstellers gegenüber der Gesellschaft war nicht vorgesehen; sie pflegt sich einzuschleichen von einem gewissen Erfolg an, und einige mögen sie rundweg ablehnen, anderen gelingt das nicht.(p.84)

He does not think about the effect his work may have on society at the time he writes it. Only after a certain amount of success as a writer does a sense of responsibilty to society develop.

Nor does Friedrich Dürrenmatt recognize any responsibility a dramatist has to society. He does not see dramatists as riddle solvers or sources of wisdom for the ills of the world. It is not his business to find sense in the world, but instead to express it. Dürrenmatt summarizes his postion:

> Ich deute die Welt nicht. Als Bühnenschriftsteller ist dies nicht meine Aufgabe.[17]

He explains his concept of a dramatist as a creator:

> Ähnlich liegt es bei der Frage nach dem Sinn eines Theaterstücks. ...mit...Recht darf...der Schriftsteller behaupten, dass ihn der Sinn, die Aussage dessen, was er da geschrieben habe, nicht interessiere mit dem Recht des Schöpfers nämlich, dessen Aufgabe es ist, zu erschaffen, nicht zu interpretieren.[18]

Dürrenmatt finds it unnecessary to explain anything because he feels no responsibility to society for his work. As an artist, however, he sees it his task to make the world visible, and he has chosen the dramatic medium as his method to realize his goal. Only when one approaches things from various methods and viewpoints can an accurate or approximate picture of the world be produced. Dürrenmatt feels it to be his task as an artist to give form not to one world, but to several possible ones as he writes that his drama is "vom Denken über die Welt zum Denken von Welten übergegangen".[19] It is noteworthy that he uses the word "Welt" instead of alternative, choice, or solution. World is all-inclusive, whereas alternative is too restrictive to a specific situation. He sets himself an ambitious goal when he talks of presenting possible worlds; whether or not he succeeds will be examined in a later chapter.

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[17] Friedrich Dürrenmatt, "Standortbestimmung zu 'Frank V.' ", Theater-Schriften und Reden, p. 186.

[18] Friedrich Dürrenmatt, "Notizen", Theater-Schriften und Reden, p. 151.

Martin Walser gives his opinions on responsibilities and tasks of the dramatist in a radio lecture titled "Engagement als Pflichtfach für Schriftstleller",[20] in which he admits that the writer does have some responsibility to society for his work. Walser begins by discussing the word "engagement", a term which he says was imported from France with little attention paid to its full meaning.[21] As to the effectiveness of the engaged writer, Walser comments: "Wichtig aber ist, dass das Gebell des Engagierten nichts bewirkt".[22] In other words, writers give the appearance of active involvement, but accomplish very little. The main question of his talk concerns writers' involvement in political events. To what extent should an author involve himself in current events to be considered an engaged writer? According to Walser, a writer's seriousness as an engaged author can best be judged by the political attitude in his literary production.

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[19] "Notizen", p. 184.

[20] Martin Walser, *Heimatkunde, Aufsätze und Reden*, (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1968), p. 103-126.

[21] The French "engagement" implies political commitment in addition to the meaning of commited or pledged to a person or a cause. Jean Paul Sartre popularized the term with the phrase "litterature engagée" which he used in an essay titled "What is Literature?".

[22] Martin Walser, "Engagement als Pflichtfach für Schriftsteller"(1968), *Heimatkunde, Aufsätze und Reden*. p. 104.

> Ich setze voraus, dass man die politische Einstellung eines Autors ohnehin vertrauenswürdiger kennenlernt in seinen literarischen Produktion.[23]

Walser supports the view that an author's personality and beliefs come out in his writing, a view which contradicts the approach of socialist realism. Dramatists writing according to the theory of socialist realism claim that literature should be objectively written and personal convictions should not enter into the work. Dürrenmatt realizes that although the dramatist does not intend to put his personality and beliefs on display in the finished product, they unconsciously play a role in the writing.[24] Walser essentially says that a writer should use the medium of expression he chose as an occupation to voice his political view, or in other words, a dramatist has the responsibility to write. If he fulfils this duty, he need not put himself in the limelight by engaging in politics.

Rolf Hochhuth, a German dramatist and director, writes historical and documentary drama. He is one of the few contemporary dramatists to write historical plays in the traditional sense. His play Der Stellvertreter (1963) brought him the world's acclaim as well as its censure. Hochhuth has very definite ideas about his responsibility as a dramatist and political engagement:

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[23] "Engagement als Pflichtfach für Schriftsteller", p.111.
[24] Friedrich Dürrenmantt, "Standortbestimmung zu 'Frank V.'", p. 189.

> Autoren müssen das schlechte Gewissen ihrer Nation artikulieren, weil die Politiker ein so gutes haben.[25]

Writers should assume the responsibility for the nation's conscience and in this sense, remind people of their past and their present situation. A dramatist must be like a thorn in society's conscience if he follows Hochhuth's concept of the playwriter's task. Not all dramatists feel a responsibility toward society. The Austrian playwright Fritz Hochwälder is an example of the uncommitted writer. Hochwälder contends that his plays do not concern so-called burning issues. Concerning his task as dramatist, Hochwälder says: "Es ist weder meine Aufgabe noch mein Vermögen, Wege zum Bessern aufzuzeigen".[26] Peter Handke on the other hand actively participates in current happenings - he has joined protest groups and demonstrations, and engaged in anti-establishment movements. Handke makes his political standpoint public and lets his own personal concerns be manifested in his writing. In an essay called "Die Literatur ist romantisch",[27] Peter Handke discusses the so-called engaged writer and argues that he is not really engaged. The meaning of the word "Engagement implies a voluntary, active commitment to change social conditions. Handke defines engagement as "die Anerkennung eines bestimmten, noch nicht verwirklichten Weltbildes"(p.275). According to Sartre, who popularized the phrase "litterature engagée", the engaged writer portrays the way society is, namely, the incorrect view, and presents alternatives and suggestions for change(p.276). Handke sees the term engaged literature as a contradiction of terms, because "engagement" is political, and hence real, while literature is romantic and unreal(p.280). Literature has meaning in its own right. When it is burdened with politics, the literary form alienates the original political message and results in an "Entwirklichung" of the message.

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[25] "Hochhuths neue Provokation: Luftkrieg ist Verbrechen", Siegried Melchinger spricht mit dem Dramatiker, Theater heute, 2(1967), p. 9.

[26] Fritz Hochwälder, "Über mein Theater", German Life and Letters, V. 12-13(1958/1960), p. 113.

> Die Literatur ist unwirklich, unrealistisch. Auch die sogenannte engagierte Literatur, obwohl gerade sie sich als realistisch bezeichnet, ist unrealistisch, romantisch(p.286).

Handke concludes his article on engaged literature with the following warning:

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[27] Peter Handke, "Die Literatur ist romantisch"(1966), Prosa/Aufsätze, p. 273-287.

> Leicht kann ein Mann, der Schriftsteller ist, sein Engagement verspielen, indem er drumherum Gedichte und Geschichten macht, weil er meint, er sei als Schriftsteller zum Engagement verpflichtet und nicht als Angehöriger einer Gesellschaft(p.288).

Until literature becomes unromantic, it can never be used politically without deceit and distortion. Engagement is an action taken as a reaction to current happenings. Once an author puts these reactions on the stage, they become formalized. The dramatic structure alienates what it is supposed to engage and it thereby loses its effect.

A discussion of dramatists' own views on "Engagement" would not be complete without including Günter Grass. Grass, a poet, novelist, and dramatist, is a leading representative of the German post-war literary generation. He broke the political silence and non-commital attitude of the literary world by actively participating in politics. After his initial lyrical attempts, he campaigned as a SPD candidate for the 1965 election and lost. Grass attacks the myth that writers belong to a free and independant breed:

> O, schöne Fiktion des freien, beziehungsweise vogelfreien, des unabhängigen Schriftstellers

> beziehungsweise Dichters.[28]

According to Grass, the aloof intellectual can turn every unpleasant fact of life into a parable. Writers who do not participate in the catastrophes of reality can construct their own world and neatly solve their problems at the end of the play or novel(p.82). Writers are consistenly asked whether they are politically committed, if they should be the nation's conscience. He answers that writers are not an elite group with all the answers. Writers, like other persons, can change things only when they are willing to compromise:

> Das Gedicht kennt keine Kompromisse, wir aber leben von Kompromissen. Wer tätig diese Spannung aushält, ist ein Narr und ändert die Welt(p.89).

With this statement, Grass suggests that although social change and literature are two separate entities, they are related. The balance between a non-compromising position and a compromising one is precarious but must be maintained for a writer to bring about change. Whereas a writer can not compromise in his work, that is, in his concept of art, he must be willing to compromise politically to be effective. The inconsequential stands taken from time to time by protesters will never bring about change. Grass urges professors and scientists, as well as writers, to actively engage in politics rather than to be satisfied with setting up utopian ideals.

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[28] Günter Grass, "Rede über das Selbstverständliche"(9.Okt. 1965), *Uber das Selbstverstandliche. Politische Schriften*, (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1969), p. 81-82. Passages from this source will be indicated by page numbers in parentheses.

Günter Grass probably did more than any other writer to bring political concern and activity back into the world of German literature, although Peter Weiss and Rolf Hochhuth more directly influenced drama. The acute concern in the past two decades over whether or not a dramatist should be engaged politically is a result of the fate literature suffered in the Third Reich. But even before the twentieth century, political dramatists have had a long history of persecution in Germany; Georg Büchner and Ernst Toller are two well-known political dramatists persecuted for their political activities. Writers after the Second World War mistrusted language, especially when it was used to express political ideas. The tendency of political non-involvement in the 1950's changed to active involvement on the part of some dramatists in the 1950's.

This chapter has given only selected comments which dramatists have made about their ideas regarding what duties and tasks they have in society. Because the purpose of drama and the theater often overlaps with the dramatist's concept of his role, a dividing line had to be made which necessarily excluded some material which could have just as easily come under this chapter. The basic question is whether a writer has a responsibility to be an engaged writer at all, not which political platform he should support. Post-war dramatists separate into two opinion groups: Weiss, Hochhuth, and Frisch who recognize a certain degree of responsibility for the effect of their work; and Dürrenmatt, Handke, Walser, and Hochwälder who deny any sense of duty toward society as dramatists. I agree with Handke and Walser on the question of a writer's involvement and duty to society. A dramatist has a duty as a citizen to exercise his political responsibility, but as a dramatist he need not ally himself with a particular public program or make his opinions public. A writer's opinions often come out unintentionally in his writing, as Dürrenmatt observes, thus making an official commentary unnecessary. At least three dozen dramatists remain who have not stated their opinions on this issue, unlike the seven authors discussed above. Nevertheless, from this small sampling, one can assume that no unanimous opinion exists. Neither complete sense of duty nor total indifference characterizes the current attitude; instead there exists an attitude that a dramatist is not responsible for the effect of his writing, but does have a certain amount of responsibility as a member of society.

# CHAPTER III

# DRAMA, THEATER, AND SOCIETY

## 1. Definition, purpose, and task of drama and theater

The question arises: What is the theater's position in society today? A glance to the past shows that the role of the theater has often been one of protest and opposition. Also, the desire to break through the existing reality and to establish a contra-reality is common to drama in most ages. Entertainment has been the basic function of theater since its beginnings. The desire to play or to imagine different worlds from the one man knows is characteristic of the human being. People like to be surprised, frightened, amused, in short, entertained. If fantasy and suspense are removed from drama, the play is no longer play and becomes a lecture, a sermon, which one attends out of a sense of obligation. What is theater today? What has it become after the confining styles of illusionism and naturalism have been broken through? Dürrenmatt sees theater primarily as a "Schule der Menschenerkenntnis", "ein Werkzeug", that man needs in order to understand man.[1] Our so-called contemporary theater is not really contemporary at all, according to Durrenmatt, but came down to us from the court theater. He continues by stating that our present-day theater is a museum for dramatic treasures of the past.[2] The ancient plays were rarely performed in the time of Goethe and Schiller, whereas the "classics" quite often comprise a substantial part of the theater's repertory today. The theater-going public often goes to the theater out of a sense of duty. Even acting has become a respectable profession, a fact which encourages the establishment of theater as an institutionalized form.

In the past, every great age of theater was made possible because of the discovery of a unique style which determined the way plays were written. No uniform style exists today, explains Dürrenmatt in "Theaterprobleme" (p.102). Contemporary theater has so many existing styles that it becomes an experimental field. A new dramatic theory arises with every new dramatic offering. Dürrenmatt, however, could conceive of a single theory of drama to embrace all styles. It would have to be a new poetics which would examine the possibilities not of a certain stage, but of the essence of the stage. The new poetics for the theater would investigate the dramaturgy of the experiment itself ("Theaterprobleme", p.102-103). In "Werkstattgespräche" with Horst Bienek, Dürrenmatt defines theater.

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[1] "Gespräch mit Friedrich Dürrenmatt", *Sinn und Form*. (1966) Heft 4, p.1226.

[2] See Durrenmatt's "Theaterprobleme" for a discussion of the court theater and the role of the classics, p.98-99.

> Theater ist also, für meine Überzeugung, nicht Wirklichkeit, sondern ein Spiel mit der Wirklichkeit, deren Verwandlung im Theater.[3]

The goal of every play is to play with the world. Dürrenmatt sees the task of art, hence drama, to create something concrete, something that has form, out of the material which the world provides ("Theaterprobleme", p. 120). A work of art must agree with itself, nothing more. If art is true to its own self, its own form, nothing more can be demanded of it.

In his article "Der Autor und das Theater",[4] Max Frisch defines theater, talks about its purposes, and questions the extent to which it can influence society. Frisch begins his article by imagining that all the theaters have been closed. He imagines how such an action would affect society. He suggests that perhaps society overrates theater and assigns values to it which it really does not possess(p.70). For Schiller, the task of the theater was clearly defined; it was a moral institution, where a certain type of behavior was presented as exemplary. If the contemporary theater is no longer regarded as a moral institution, then perhaps it serves a political function? Frisch directs our attention to the fact that the only well-known political plays extol a leftist or socialist ideology. He asks, how many first-rate faschist plays exist? Therefore the idea of the theater serving a political purpose is misleading. Besides, he doubts that theater can bring a person to a reexamination of his political convictions, let alone a changing of them.

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[3] Horst Bienek, *Werkstattgespräche mit Schriftstellern*, (München: Carl Hauser Verlag, 1962), p.101.

[4] Max Frisch, "Der Autor und das Theater"(1964), *Öffentlichkeit als Partner*, (Frankfurt a.M : Suhrkamp, 1967), p.68-89. Ideas and quotations from this source will be indicated by page numbers in parentheses.

> Millionen von Zuschauern haben Brecht gesehen und werden ihn wieder sehen; dass einer dadurch seine politische Denkweise geändert hat oder auch nur einer Prüfung unterzieht, wage ich zu bezweifeln(p.72-73).

Frisch has similar ideas as Dürrenmatt in respect to the nature and task of the theater. Dürrenmatt talks of a play's super-reality which goes beyond the limits of the world's reality.[5] Frisch thinks that each scene of a play should go beyond the present-day world and become what one calls a vision. The theater should be an answer to the

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[5] "Der Realität muss im Theater eine Überrealitat gegenüberstehen." Friedrich Dürrenmatt, "Standortbestimmung zu 'Frank V.'", *Theater-Schriften und Reden*, p.186.

"unportrayableness" of society.

> Selbst wenn ein Stückeschreiber sich politisch nicht engagiert, nicht meint, dass das Theater zur Veränderung der Gesellschaft beitrage, selbst dann also, wenn wir die Frage der Beschreibbarkeit der Welt nicht zur gesellschaftlichen Frage ummünzen, gilt, dass wir auf die Unabbildbarkeit der vorhandenen Welt nur mit Utopie antworten konnen, dass jede Szene, indem sie spielbar ist, und im glücklichen Fall abbildet, was man eine Vision nennt(p.77).

A play does not alter the world, but alters our relationship to the world:

> Gäbe es die Literatur nicht, liefe die Welt vielleicht nicht anders, aber sie wurde anders gesehen, nämlich so wie die jeweiligen Nutzniesser sie gesehen haben möchten(p.87).

Theater puts the world and society in question. It can reveal and unmask shams or critically examine how language is used. So long as literature is alive, Frisch believes it can bring language to terms with reality. Drama has the potential to be a touchstone for the present-day reality(p.87-88). Frisch concludes that whether or not we overrate the theater is a meaningless question. He closes with the hope that theater can assume the "innere Führung" of society(p.89).

If theater is likened to a soul or a conscience, it does not mean its presence is essential to life, but it does presuppose a higher level of consciousness. Theater is not necessary to life, but by appealing to the faculties of the mind, theater enriches life. It offers different possibilities to imagine and interpret the world.

Carl Zuckmayer's opinions on the task and purpose of drama stand in sharp contrast to Frisch's. Zuckmayer sees dramatic art as a necessity which no technical substitute can replace. In the section _Documents on Contemporary Playwrights_, a translated quotation of Zuckmayer's opinion on the matter is given:

> If dramatic art were to cease or to become degenerate, mankind would sink back into a prehistory and a pre-religious state which would inevitably lead to its most terrible crisis, to its downfall, and to its spiritual - and therefore, also physical death.*

In short, Zuckmayer says if drama dies, culture dies. He seems to overstate the situation and is somewhat too emotional and irrational about the purpose of drama. In contrast, Frisch's assessment of drama is a much more rational and accurate one. Frisch's article in fact questions attitudes like this, which overrate the theater and endow it with semi-mystical and religious powers. Zuckmayer bases his statement on a subjunctive "if": "If dramatic art were to cease or become degenerate, then culture would die". Drama has not ceased, so that possibility is excluded for the present. How does Zuckmayer determine when drama becomes degenerate? Surely he would have regarded some of the contempoary plays by Wolfgang Hildesheimer, Peter Handke, or perhaps Peter Weiss as decadent, because the work of all three shows a decline of some kind or another, either in form, plot or purpose. Because of the obvious overstatement of the case, the time at which Zuckmayer wrote the above statement should be taken into consideration. Allusions to decadence and the fall of mankind refer perhaps to the stifled dramatic life under the Nazis. Zuckmayer wrote this statement in 1955, when Germany had not quite recovered from political supression of the Hitler era. In that light, Zuckmayer was partly right. Germany did indeed experience a downfall when the dramatic life became degenerate. The post-war generation of dramatists, the ones who began writing in the mid-forties and continued up to the present day, tend to avoid such sweeping generalizations. They want to analyse theater and its purposes more critically and candidly.

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* Siegfried Melchinger, _Concise Encyclopedia of Modern Dramatists_, p. 107.

Martin Walser thinks that the theater should make people aware of their "Bewusstsein".[7] But more than that, he regards the theater as an asylum from the outside world; there is no place like the theater for revealing the conditioned "Bewusstsein". The theater-goer, so harrassed, conditioned, and victimized by the outside world, can become a spectator and judge in the theater. Above all, Walser does not regard theater as a didactic institution:

> Der Möglichkeit nach gibt es keine Institution der Gesellschaft, die so wenig Rekrutierungsabsichten hat wie das Theater(p.1).

The theater offers a sanctuary from the world's appeals and demands. It lets the audience, who cause the events in the outside world, be witnesses and experts inside the theater. Theater makes no demands on the audience's "Bewusstsein", it only makes them aware of it.

Walser explains that in the recent past, dramatic theory influenced by bourgeois idealism strove for a stage copy of reality in a 1:1 proportion. Walser names Beckett as the first dramatist to break with the tradition of imitation of the world's reality on stage. Walser says that historically speaking, the stage has always had this function. It was only the introduction of illusionism that negated the portrayal of a society's "Bewusstsein" on the stage. Regarding the purpose of drama, Walser writes:

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[7] Martin Walser, "Für einen neuen Realismus", Theater heute, 1(1965), p.3. Ideas and quotations from this source indicated by page numbers in parentheses.

> Stücke sind doch eher dazu da, dass man in ihnen etwas über menschliches Handeln erfährt, als dass sie zeigen, wie die Geschichte hätte verlaufen sollen (p.4).

As "Spielort des Bewusstseins",* a drama's task would be to bring the burdens of the past on stage for portrayal and discussion, with the result that the audience becomes conscious of its "Bewusstsein" and eventually comes to terms with it.

Throughout his theoretical writing, Peter Handke also talks of making the audience aware. Handke objects to the fact that theater is accepted as a natural occurrence. He wants to make people aware that the stage is something artificial and contrived, something "gemacht" as opposed to "geworden", an entity with a reality of its own. Handke objects to the traditional theater because the theatrical representation of reality has become too formalized and automatic. Handke defines theater and its limits as follows:

"Das Theater ist...dermassen bestimmt, das alles,

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* Although Leopold Ahlsen uses this phrase in a *Theater heute* interview, it applies so well to Walser's concept of the purpose of the theater that I have used the term in the discussion of Walser's theoretical statements. "Wie ist die heutige Welt auf dem Theater darzustellen? Eine Umfrage bei Dramatikern", *Theater heute*, (1963) Sonderheft, p.71f.

> was ausserhalb des Theaters Ernsthaftigkeit, Anliegen, Eindeutigkeit, Finalität ist Spiel wird, dass also Eindeutigkeit, Engagement etc. auf dem Theater eben durch den fatalen Spiel- und Bedeutungsraum rettungslos verspielt werden..."*

Once the seriousness of the outside world is staged, it loses its effect and becomes, as Handke puts it, "verspielt". Serious matters are then unintentionally misrepresented on stage. This is what bothers Handke about Brecht's plays. Serious conflicts are brought to the stage and become simply a matter of form because they are staged for a definite purpose. The solutions to the conflicts are formalized and lose their effectiveness. Theater formalizes every movement, word, and silence (p.305). Handke wants to make the audience realize, that the reality of the theater does not correspond to the reality of the outside world. The theater as a moral institution does not interest Handke. He sees it serving a moral purpose only when it shows the audience that governing powers have neither stage nor God-given rights to exercise their power. In Handke's opinion, theater can be a moral institution only when it intends to replace the existing order with another.

Fritz Hochwälder, Rolf Hochhuth, and Wolfgang

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* Peter Handke, "Strassentheater und Theatertheater", *Prosa Gedichte Theaterstücke Hörspiel Aufsätze*. (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1969), p.305.

Hildesheimer also give their views on the purpose of theater. Their views will be discussed only briefly since they do not pursue the question to any great length as Dürrenmatt or Frisch do. Rolf Hochhuth maintains that the essential task of the theater is to make people aware "dass der Mensch ein verantwortliches Wesen ist".[10] Hochhuth's dramatic theory and his playwriting revolve around the idea that man is a responsible being and the purpose of drama is to bring the audience to a realization of this fact. Wolfgang Hildesheimer thinks that theater should show the audience the disorderly, senseless, and random nature of the world, in short, its absurdity. Drama should portray man's helplessness and doubt so that man becomes aware of his situation. Drama should be a permanent unanswerable question that confronts the audience.[11] Fritz Hochwälder, an Austrian playwright, gives an indifferent, almost inimical opinion concerning the purpose of drama and the dramatist. He writes that it is neither his task nor responsibility as a dramatist to point out ways to better society. Furthermore, he is not interested in any such mission for himself or the theater.[12]

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[10] "Wie ist die heutige Welt auf dem Theater darzustellen? Eine Umfrage bei Dramatikern", *Theater heute*, (1963) Sonderheft, p.73.

[11] Wolfgang Hildesheimer, "Erlanger Rede über das absurde Theater", V. 6 *Spectaculum*, (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1963), p.340-343.

[12] Fritz Hochwälder, "Über mein Theater", *German Life and Letters*, V.12-13, (1958-1960), p.113.

In this section, the theater was described as a "Schule der Menschenerkenntnis", a place which alters our perspectives of life, and a sanctuary from the world. Although not one playwright used the word "didactic" to describe the purpose of the theater in the present-day world, their ideas bordered on an educative function for the theater. Except for the occasional skeptic, Fritz Hochwälder in this case, all the above-mentioned dramatists think that theater has value for today's society. Theater puts the world into question; it gives new outlooks. One can learn about human behavior in the theater. Hence, theater serves a humanistic purpose in that its purpose stems from a concern for the welfare of society and mankind. The unique characteristic of the theater is that it demands nothing more from society than society's attention during a performance.

## 2. Extent to which theater can mirror or change society

This section concerns two problems: first, can the present-day world; i.e., society, be portrayed on the stage; and second, can theater change society, and if so, to what extent. Dürrenmatt formulated the first question in his essay "Theaterprobleme"(p.119), as he explained that the world has grown too vast, complex, and mechanical to be portrayed on the stage. Schiller's world presupposed a world that could be envisioned, but today's world is too anonymous, Dürrenmatt argues. True representatives of the world are lacking in the present age. Brecht of course believed that the world could be portrayed on stage, but only when possibilities for change and a better society were shown. In 1963 Theater heute further pursued this question as it asked a number of dramatists if the theater should represent the present-day world and if so, if today's world was portrayable on stage.

Leopold Ahlsen, a German dramatist, director, and former actor, maintains that world representation in the theater is impossible as a task, but possible as one aspect of what theater can do.[13] Ahlsen explains this statement by citing the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when an analysis of society could still be portrayed on the stage. The dramatist still had opportunities to discover and interpret his world. But today, social, political, and economic questions have become so complex, that no one can grasp them in their entirety. In addition to the complexity of the current world, Ahlsen points out that drama is a genre which is not well-suited to a portrayal of a whole world or society(p.71).

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[13] "Wie ist die heutige Welt auf dem Theater darzustellen? Eine Umfrage bei Dramatikern", Theater heute, (1963) Sonderheft, p.71.

Ahlsen also presents Dürrenmatt's idea that true representatives of the current world are missing. Formerly, political responsibility was relatively easy to portray in the figure of a king, but relationships in today's world can no longer be so objectively represented in the form of a single person. Ahlsen considers this a dilemma for the theater:

> Tatsächlich ist die objektive Welt aber für das Theater völlig irrelevant. Künstlerisch relevant ist nur das Individuum. Sind die komplizierten Zuständlichkeiten unserer Welt objektiv auf dem Theater nicht darstellbar, so ist doch nach wie vor darstellbar: ihre subjektive Spiegelung im Bewusstsein; ihre Wirkung auf den einzelnen; die provozierte Reaktion des Individiums(p.71).

Ahlsen does not question the stage's ability to mirror or portray society. The world is simply too complicated to be mirrored, only the world's effect on the individual remains portrayable. The stage reflects a subjective image of how the world affects an individual. Dürrenmatt remarked that art today can only embrace the victims("Theaterprobleme", p. 120). Ahlsen is of a similar opinion, although he states it differently. The stage for Ahlsen reflects not an image of the world, but the world's effects on the individual. It shows an individual's reaction to the world. This idea appeared earlier in the second chapter as a motivation for writing. Writing is a way of reacting to the world, a way to answer or talk back to the vast, complex society in which one finds himself.

Max Frisch, on the other hand, is of the opinion that the world defies representation, but since theater is an art form, it can exist for its own purpose and represent itself.[14] Even when a dramatist does not engage in political writing in an attempt to change society, the answer to the "unportrayableness" of the world lies in the presentation of utopia on the stage. This desired utopia is the representation of the vision which Frisch sees as the theater's task to present (p.77). Frisch uses Brecht as an example of a dramatist who did not use the world at hand, but portrayed an ideal marxist one. Brecht, like so many playwrights in the past, rarely portrayed his own world, but another one. Frisch explains that it is necessary to change worlds in order to portray what lets itself be portrayed, namely, utopia. Frisch considers Dürrenmatt's play, *Der Besuch der alten Dame*, the best example of a modern play which depicts reality (p.77). Dürrenmatt, unlike Brecht, did not put a better world on the stage, but rather one that could be played and seen through. A dramatist can choose to portray a utopian ideal or a realistic world, as Dürrenmatt chose to do. But the writer must change worlds, that is, use a utopian situation, if he decides to take the first option. Only when he wants to portray the present-day world's reality, can he most easily use the present-day world on stage.

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[14] Max Frisch, "Der Autor und das Theater", p.76-77. Ideas from this source will be indicated by page numbers in parentheses.

When asked in an interview whether theater is able to portray the current world, Martin Walser replied with the question: What else is there to portray?[15] Besides, he considers it a matter for the directors, since they can choose to present a play in the style of Brecht's or Schiller's world. Writers really have no say in the matter. However, Walser does think that the world is portrayable on the stage:

> Die gestrige Welt verwandelt sich in die morgige... Das Theater müsste sich anmassen, das Bewusstsein dieses Prozesses zu sein. Dadurch, dass es ihn darstellt.[16]

Once again Walser brings in the idea of "Bewusstsein". The world which Walser sees as portrayable is not a tangible reproduction of events, but of ideas and attitudes of the conscience. Instead of a static picture of society on stage, Walser proposes to portray an active, on-going process of thought development.

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[15] "Wie ist die heutige Welt auf dem Theater darzustellen? Eine Umfrage bei Dramatikern", __Theater heute__, (1963) Sonderheft, p.69.

[16] __Ibid.__

Rolf Hochhuth is another dramatist who does not think that the present-day world is portrayable in all its facets. Like Ahlsen, he bases his reason on man's place in society.

> Man kann sagen: wo das Humane, auch in reduzierter Form, nichts mehr zu suchen hat, hat auch das Theater sein Recht verloren.[17]

Man was once the measure of all things, but he has lost his significance in some areas. Wherever man no longer has anything to offer or to seek, the theater loses its claim in that area. Hochhuth explains the theater's impotency in the technical world as a result of man's insignificance in the realm of technology (p.73).

For Peter Weiss, the present-day world is something indefinite. It shifts according to his current interest. Weiss is of the opinion that:

> Alles was sich heute auf der Bühne darstellt, ist repräsentiv für irgendeinen Gesichtspunkt in der

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[17] "Wie ist die heutige Welt auf dem Theater darzustellen? Eine Umfrage bei Dramatikern", Theater heute, (1963) Sonderheft, p.73.

heutigen Welt."[1]

Weiss thinks that the world is portrayable on stage because:

> Was ringsum auf diesen Bühnen stattfindet, so schaudderhaft, verlogen und missglückt es oft ist, es ist immer ein Bild der heutigen Welt(p.70).

Weiss further states that the portrayals of society stand somewhere between the extremes of revolt and acceptance of tradition. Imperfections and inadequate images mirror the world as it actually is, hence a fragmented world is reflected quite naturally by incomplete images on stage. The only complete, whole picture one can give of a complete world on stage is, as Frisch already stated, a utopian one.

A consensus exists regarding drama's potential to change people or society. Dürrenmatt, Handke, Frisch, Hochhuth, Walser, Hildesheimer, and Hey believe that theater and drama can no longer influence or even change the world and its inhabitants. Dürrenmatt says that at most a dramatist can disturb the world, seldom influence it, but never change it. Frisch expresses a somewhat more optimistic view as he writes that drama can not alter the world, but it does alter our relationship to it. Hochhuth has no delusions about his work. He realizes that his historical and documentary plays will not influence people enough so that they will not repeat past mistakes. Hildesheimer bluntly states that theater has never purified or changed any condition or person.[19] Handke regards "Theatertheater", theater in the traditional, established sense, ineffective as a means to change conditions. Only Weiss is convinced that theater is an effective means for social change. This seemingly pragmatic approach is not without idealism. As already pointed out in the last chapter, highly subjective and idealistic reasons often motivate dramatists to write for the stage. The dramatists discussed here simply realize the limitations of the theater and do not expect more of it than it can give. Most of them think that theater can reflect the present society to some extent, but it can not bring about any sweeping revolutionary changes. The dramatists are confident that theater does have value for society, otherwise they would not be writing for the stage.

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[1] "Wie ist die heutige Welt darzustellen auf dem Theater, darzustellen? Eine Umfrage bei Dramatikern", *Theater heute*, (1963) Sonderheft, p.70.

This chapter reveals that most dramatists do not assign any clearly defined aims and goals to the theater. The theater should persuade, not preach. It should suggest possibilities for other ways of doing and seeing things. Theater has the task of guiding the spectator through introspection, but should not dictate any certain line of thinking. Theater as a means to make people aware occurs in one form or another in most of the dramatists' theoretical writings. Various dramatists differ in what they want to make the audience aware of: Walser wants to bring about an audience self-awareness; Handke wants the on-lookers to become aware of the theater itself; and Hochhuth strives to make the audience aware of happenings in the world or society. The consensus is that the modern man is to regard nothing in the theater as natural. He is to shake off the conditioned responses and become aware of them for what they are. Only then will he know them, recognize them, and be able to cope with them.

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[19] Wolfgang Hildesheimer, "Erlanger Rede uber das absurde Theater", V.6 *Spectaculum*, p.343.

## 3. Effect of science and technology on playwriting

Science has had a greater effect on the arts in the last one hundred years than in any other age. Scientific discoveries and technological advances have altered man's perspective of himself and his role in society. Naturalism is an example of a theatrical movement which grew out of an almost religious belief in social Darwinism. Naturalism, which flourished from 1880 to 1910 and viewed man as the victim of heredity, animal instincts, and social evils beyond his control, provides one of the best examples of a dramatic movement directly influenced by science. It aimed at a kind of photographic objectivity rather than imaginative selectivity in portraying the details of real life on the stage. Social sciences, in this case, psychology, also influenced the dramatic movement of expressionism, the direct opposite of Naturalism. The theater's confrontation with science continues in the present-day. Themes concerning the scientist's responsibility to society for his discoveries occur in many plays. Three of the better known examples are Brecht's *Das Leben Galileo Galilei* (1936/39); Heimar Kipphardt's *In der Sache J. Robert Oppenheimer* (1964); and Dürrenmatt's *Die Physiker* (1961).

Dürrenmatt says that academic scholarship has all too often deprived artists of subject matter by giving things shape before the artist has a chance to do it. The scientist has taken over the function of the artist.

> Es ist nun einmal so, dass die Wissenschaft, indem sie sich...nicht nur auf die Natur, sondern auch auf den Geist und Kunst stürzte, Fakten schuf, die nicht mehr zu umgehen sind...,dem Kunstler aber dadurch die Stoffe entzog, indem sie selber das tat, was doch Aufgabe der Kunst gewesen wäre.[**]

This leaves the playwright in a dilemma. If he continues to use traditional subject matter, he finds himself mirroring science and doing nothing more than acknowledging its findings. Dürrenmatt cites Shakespeare's play *Julius Caesar* as a play which was possible only because Plutarch was a storyteller as well as a historian. Likewise, myths are now a subject for scholarly research. We no longer believe or live them, instead we hold them up for examination and form opinions on them. Once scholarly research steps in, the artist loses supremacy over his material. Dürrenmatt thinks it is possible to regain material and supremacy over it by parodying the subject, since parody presupposes imagination and invention. ("Theaterprobleme",p.127-128). By reducing figures and portraying them contrary to what they are, the artist can again have freedom in his writing.

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[**] Friedrich Dürrenmatt, "Theaterprobleme", p.126-127.

Parody often results in a bizarre, distorted image, in the grotesque. Dürrenmatt and Grass people their work with grotesque figures who can be regarded as parodies. Dürrenmatt's play *Der Besuch der alten Dame* and Grass' novel *Die Blechtrommel* are two of the best examples for works with grotesque figures. Is there a direct relationship between the re-introduction of the grotesque in drama and science's intrusion on the stage? Probably not, because the grotesque element in literature, and hence drama, has appeared from time to time throughout literary history. The seventeenth century was one of the most famous periods for the grotesque in German literature.[21] It is not coincidental that the grotesque coincided with the disasterous Thirty Years' War, for the grotesque made an appearance in the literature of Germany following a similar period of devastation and ruin. Grotesque elements found in the works of Grass reflect the immediate past, as did the grotesque in the seventeenth century. Dürrenmatt parodies the world to regain supremacy over his material, and the grotesque often enters his parodies. Germany's turbulent years did not affect the Swiss Dürrenmatt to the same extent as they did the German Grass. When Dürrenmatt uses the grotesque in his parodies, he does it for a different reason than Grass, who uses the grotesque to portray the distorted and bizarre behind an accepted "normal" society.

It is also true that classical and Christian myths have lost their significance in a scientific age. Science itself has attained mythical dimensions as it is hailed as the solution to the world's ills. The scientist has replaced God; he has control over life and death. This myth of science's power is especially popular in socialist realism, where technology and socialism go hand in hand to build a new society. The scientific take-over also has its advantages. The artist gains a new freedom when he is relieved of the task to explain the world. He is no longer obligated to give an account of things; he need only give a form to them which science has not seen. The artist can enhance and enlarge on the skeletal scientific representation by portraying an object or an idea in new dimensions. Leopold Ahlsen discusses science's effect on contemporary drama in the 1963 survey in *Theater heute*.[22] He goes back to its beginnings, to naturalism, which he describes as the child of the scientific age. Naturalism is a special case in literary history. It aims at a technical, unbiased art. Moreover, Ahlsen finds it not at all coincidental that the official literary policy of the East is socialist realism, because the influence of the nineteenth century is so firmly fixed in the socialist countries(p.71). The naturalist thinks and feels scientifically. Ahlsen regards Brecht, for example, as a great naturalist dramatist. In science only the universal or general counts, the exception or individual is insignificant. Not so in drama, Ahlsen explains:

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[21] Grimmelshausen's *Simplicissimus*, for example, contains some of the most grotesque scenes in Germany's literature.

> In der Kunst, zumal im Drama, ist dagegen nur das Besondere, ist nur das Individuum konkret: "die Welt" ("das Objektive") ist künstlerisch eine Abstraktion, ihre sachlichen Zustände und Institutionen sind theatralisch ohne

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[22] "Wie ist die heutige Welt auf dem Theater darzustellen. Eine Umfrage bei Dramatikern", *Theater heute*, (1963) Sonderheft, p.71.

Wirklichkeit(p.71).

Ahlsen sees today's writer as moving "auf den wohlbestellten Terrains wissenschaftlicher Fachdisziplinen"(p.71). Individuals can no longer be held responsible or be shown as the cause of historical events in the objective world. This objective world is relevant only in a situation where the individual is important. Although science has made an objective portrayal of the world impossible on stage, Ahlsen does not regard it as a significant loss. Drama is better suited to a portrayal of the individual rather than a world portrayal. The individual's reaction to the world is important, how the world provokes a person is the real subject matter of drama(p.71). In summary, Ahlsen sees the effect of science on the theater manifested to its greatest extent in naturalism. The world of science has little relevance for drama, because they approach man and the world differently. They do not cancel each other out, but simply move on different levels, science concerning itself with the objective world and drama treating man's subjective world. Rolf Hochhuth differs from Ahlsen in that he holds man responsible for the events in the world. He thinks that science has rendered man powerless in some areas; i.e., in the technical world. Wherever man is no longer supreme, he loses his significance.[23] Natural science can give a more exact picture of the world, but Hochhuth does not see it as drama's task to reproduce an exact image of man in the world. Hochhuth disagrees with Ahlsen in that he regards it as the drama's task to portray man and not the world.

Technology has undoubtedly limited the dramatist. He can no longer be like Plutarch, a historian-storyteller. Nor can a dramatist any longer explain the world in a mythical context as the Greeks did. However, this loss does not seem to be a significant one according to the dramatists' statements. It can be compensated for as Dürrenmatt has done. Ahlsen and Hochhuth see the limitation as basically a boon to the dramatist, for it allows him to concentrate on what drama is best-suited for: man, his conflicts and his reactions to the world.

## 4. Advantages and limitations of the theater in relation to the cinema

The preceeding section dealt with science's effect on theater in general terms. This section treats one specific technological development of the twentieth century, the cinema. Cinematic art poses a similar dilemma for the theater as photography posed for painting. How can one equal or surpass a near-perfect representation of the world? In turn, television has upset the cinema's dominance in the audio-visual art world the same way movies did to theater five decades ago. Several dramatists specifically comment on cinematic art in relation to their dramatic writing. Rolf Hochhuth states that film has a pronounced epic character, whereas drama is tied to theses, to the conflict of ideas. Drama can not dispense with words, whereas the film can.[24]

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[23] "Wie ist die heutige Welt auf dem Theater darzustellen? Eine Umfrage bei Dramatikern", Theater heute, (1963) Sonderheft, p.73.

Peter Handke discusses the film versus theater in an article titled "Theater und Film: Das Elend des Vergleichens".[25] It has traditionally been the case, that what appears on stage is discussed by society. According to Handke, theater used to be a communication medium, but has long since lost claim to this title through its reactionary methods. The important point is that it still has a possibility of regaining its former prominence as a place for public communication. Handke thinks that theater provides a good possibility to express oneself. It offers a better opportunity for an author to express himself than filmwriting because:

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[24] Partricia Marx, "An Interview with Rolf Hochhuth", Partisan Review, (1964), p.336-367.
[25] Peter Handke, "Theater und Film: Das Elend des Vergleichens", Prosa/Aufsätze, p.314-326.

> Das Theater hat die Möglichkeit künstlerischer zu werden, damit es endlich wieder ungewohnt, unvertraut wird.[26]

The imitation which cinema strives for is often canceled by the technical nature of the film. Theater incorporates the technical aspect and through it appeals directly to the audience.

Peter Weiss, a former film maker, also cites the directness of the stage as an advantage. It can establish an immediate relationship with a living audience. Before Weiss wrote _Marat/Sade_, he was convinced that cinema was the best medium for expression in our time.

> Eine Weile, als ich mich mit dem Film beschäftigte, hatte ich den Eindruck, dass mit dem Theater nichts mehr anzufangen sei, die Ausdrucksweise unserer Generation eben der Film sei, dass man mit dem Film alles sagen und an alles herankommen und es darstellen könnte.[27]

Weiss realized that the theater's advantage lay in its appealing nature. The playwright can demonstrate his idea directly in front of a live audience and receive instant feedback. This advantage is especially important for Weiss' theater, since he aims at changing society. Theater can directly address and instill a sense of urgency, whereas the film remains too distant and removed from direct audience response.

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[26] _Ibid_.
[27] "Gespräch mit Peter Weiss", _Sinn und Form_, (1965) p.684.

Max Frisch prefers theater to cinema for its here-and-now quality, which makes theater stimulating. Theater is exciting and eventful when it gives the audience a sense of a happening. Unfortunately, theater today often lacks the spontaneous zest which gives this sense of an event. Even the most technically perfect productions do not assure the spontaneity which is so essential to the life of the theater.[28]. Richard Hey maintains that the entertaining function which the theater formerly had has been transferred to the cinema. The playfulness, the comic, is no longer found in the theater, but now belongs to the realm of the cinema. Cinema can offer better, more colorful, and more refined entertainment than theater. Since the film is more suited for realistic portrayals, Hey sees no use for realism and naturalism on the stage. He describes the dramatist's dilemma with a mother and daughter metaphor.

Da die Töchter ihm so vieles aus der Hand genommen

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[28] Max Frisch, "Schillerpreis-Rede"(1965), Öffentlichkeit als Partner, p.91-93.

> haben, bleibt dem Dramatiker auch aus diesem Grund nichts anderes übrig, als zu den Müttern des Theaters herabzusteigen, damit er auf den Brettern, die die Welt bedeuten, auch eine bedeutende Welt zeigen kann.[29]

By way of summary, the theater is limited in its ability to imitate as precisely as the cinema can. Most of the dramatists who commented on the theater versus the film stressed the theater's direct quality. The theater can offer live entertainment or contact, which the film can not do. In fact, the technical nature of the film was seen in several instances to hinder the presentation. Theater has no technical intermediary such as a camera that films the action and reproduces it on a screen. Theater has only the stage which has the immediate performance. Once a play has been given, it will never happen again in the same way. A film on the other hand can replay the same action again and again. I think the theater's advantage lies in its humanness. One can not escape the technical world when sitting in a movie house as easily as one can in a theater house, where persons perform live for the benefit of other persons.

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[29] Richard Hey, "Schreiben furs Theater", Theater im Gesprach, (Munchen: Albert Langen and Georg Muller, 1963), p.259-260.

# CHAPTER IV

## Themes

### 1. Friedrich Dürrenmatt: "Binsenwahrheiten"?

Dürrenmatt is a complex person with whom to begin a discussion of themes in modern drama, because his theoretical writing is sometimes difficult and contradictory. He does not mention themes very often and when he does, it is often in a vague, roundabout way. On the other hand, Dürrenmatt provides an excellent starting point for a discussion of themes, because he is a writer who writes in all three roles. His stance in the various writer-roles stresses the uncertain, open-ended nature of a discussion of dramatic theory using the dramatists' own statements. Dürrenmatt's role as a playwright is well-established and stands unchallenged. He has proven himself a master of this role and seems to enjoy it. From 1951 to 1953, he was a drama critic and wrote theater reviews for the *Weltwoche* in Zürich. During this period, he critically wrote about other people's plays. Since the failure of his play *Frank der Fünfte* (1959), Dürrenmatt has tended to criticize and interpret his own plays more than he did in the fifties.

His role as a theorist stands open. Dürrenmatt is notorious for the inconsistent and contradictory nature of his theory in his dramatic writing. He comments at length on form but never directly mentions themes. His plays actually have several recurring themes which alternately appear in all his plays: justice and man's attempt to achieve it, a chaotic world seeming to belong to some sort of divine plan, the disintegration of an ordered society, the demoralizing and destructive nature of economic ambition, and man's loneliness and perseverance in the world. Dürrenmatt often adapted biblical subjects or stories in his earlier works. *Es steht geschrieben* is based on an attempt to realize a utopian society on a Christian ideal; *Der Blinde* is patterned after the story of Job; and *Ein Engel kommt nach Babylon* concerns the biblical city where the presence of a divine being leads to chaos. The figure of a worldly-wise executioner is a hallmark for Dürrenmatt's plays and detective stories. The themes of man's fragility and the absurdity of ideals and philosophies play an integral role in his work. His masterpieces, *Romulus der Grosse*, *Der Besuch der alten Dame*, and *Die Physiker* concern the absurdity and paradoxical nature of an apparently ordered society. Nowhere in his theoretical writings, however, does Dürrenmatt explicitly mention any of the above themes. At most, he alludes to them.[1]

Dürrenmatt states that the stage is not a battlefield of theories, philosophies, or manifestos. From this statement we can conclude that Dürrenmatt does not consider the spreading of a certain philosophy or doctrine as thematic material. We can also deduce from Dürrenmatt's statement that he is not attracted by idea or thesis plays. In fact, Dürrenmatt states that two kinds of plays exist: one kind written from an idea and another kind which tells a story. Dürrenmatt indicates that he prefers the latter when he says that he does not feel bound to any style or ideology, but only to the story.[2] Therefore the original deduction that Dürrenmatt does not believe that problems or theses are ideal themes is correct.

Dürrenmatt's concept of a hero is of one who endures and survives and one who withstands the world's temptations and dangers. Could one conclude that an individual's survival is a theme which Dürrenmatt considers appropriate for today's theater? This assumption proves correct in light of the following quotation:

> Die Welt als ganze ist in Verwirrung...Die Welt des

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[1] For a more detailed discussion of Durrenmatt's thematic material, see Murray B. Peppard, Friedrich Dürrenmatt, (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1969).

[2] "Gespräch mit Friedrich Dürrenmatt", Sinn und Form, (1966) Heft 4, p.1226.

> einzelnen dagegen ist noch zu bewältigen, hier gibt es noch Schuld und Sühne. Wie der einzelne besteht oder wie er untergeht, ist das Thema auch meines Hörspiels...Nur im Privaten kann die Welt auch heute in Ordnung sein und der Frieden verwirklicht werden.[3]

It should be noted that these sentences do not come from an essay on dramatic theory, but from a speech on the occasion of receiving a prize for writing radio plays. Despite its reference to radio plays, the idea expressed in the above statements gives some insight to Dürrenmatt's concept of dramatic themes. This idea contradicts his desire to portray "worlds" on the stage. Why should various worlds; i.e., possibilities, interest Dürrenmatt when only the individual's endurance concerns him? One could stretch an explanation by assuming that "Welten" could be interpreted as inner, private ideas of the world, but I think that answer would be too forced. Of course, both themes could exist side by side and not necessarly contradict each other. This is probably what Dürrenmatt would answer, that they do not cancel each other out, but simply offer two various theme possbilities.

One can eventually deduce Dürrenmatt's themes by narrowing down what he does not believe are suitable ones, since he tends to approach themes from a negative aspect. For example, he does not consider historical battles worthwhile themes, for he replies:

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[3] Friedrich Dürrenmatt, "Ansprache anlässlich der Verleihung des Kriegsblinden-Preises", *Theater-Schriften und Reden*, p.48-49.

> Als Knabe habe ich zwar leidenschaftlich Schlachten gezeichnet,... seitdem finde ich die wirtschaftlichen Schlachten weitaus wichtiger, halte sie aber auch für blutiger.[4]

One of Dürrenmatt's most contradictory statements regarding themes is the following:

> Es handelt sich nur um Binsenwahrheiten. Aber heute ist eine Zeit, in der es leider nur noch um Binsenwahrheiten geht.[5]

Dürrenmatt believes that themes should consist of truisms, that is, of self-evident truths too obvious to mention? Whatever one could say about Dürrenmatt's plays, one can not call them trifling. Dürrenmatt obviously does not apply his own theory to his writings. His themes are powerful and compelling. They are in no way commonplace.

Why is Dürrenmatt so hesitant to name themes? Perhaps the answer is that he does not want to be labeled. In a speech, Dürrenmatt once stated that he does not want to be regarded as a cynic or a moralist("Der Rest ist Dank",p.71).

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[4] Horst Bienek, Werkstattgespräche, p.101.
[5] Friedrich Dürrenmatt, "Der Rest ist Dank", Theater-Schriften und Reden, p.71-72.

He definitely moralizes in many of his plays and expresses cynical opinions in others. His views that marriage is a sophisticated institution for punishment in *Die Ehe des Herrn Mississippi* and that justice can be bought in *Der Besuch der alten Dame* are unquestionably cynical. In fact, one's initial reaction to Dürrenmatt is that he drives his moral point too hard. One wishes he would ease up somewhat in the presentation of his ideas. Why does Dürrenmatt insist that he is not moralizing? Probably for one of two reasons. Either he is sincere and does not realize the effect his plays have, in which case he does not realize he is being a cynic or a moralist, or he purposely contradicts his theoretical statements to confuse or to baffle critics in an attempt to avoid being stereotyped. Dürrenmatt is a shrewd writer. I doubt that he is oblivious to the discrepancies which occur in his plays and theory. I believe he enjoys making sport with the critics. He plays a game with them and does not expect to always be taken seriously. In fact, he has attributed the failure of some of his plays to the Germans' lack of humor. Dürrenmatt probably has the attitude that if critics want to take him seriously, he is certainly willing to play along with them. He is serious at times; but that will be seen in the discussion of form in the next chapter. It is only in his theoretical writings that the Swiss playwright refuses to refer to specific themes and messages plays should convey.

To summarize what Dürrenmatt believes to be suitable thematic material, a few of the deduced points will be reiterated. Although he thinks that true representatives of our age are lacking, he maintains that an individual's inner private life can create an orderly world. This can be done through the portrayal of basic truths. That is where the "heroic" in the non-classical meaning is to be found in today's world. In the final analysis, Dürrenmatt is concerned primarily with presenting human beings who survive the chaotic world.

## 2. Max Frisch: Drama of permutation

Max Frisch, also a Swiss dramatist, is often discussed along with Friedrich Dürrenmatt in critical writing. Both are dramatists as well as prose writers. Frisch has not written any actual dramatic theory like Dürrenmatt's Theater-Schriften und Reden, but has expressed theoretical ideas in essays and interviews. The opportunity and freedom to make changes plays an important part in Frisch's theory. Frisch's tendency to revise his plays is one visible proof of his ideas on change. He has revised several of his plays two or more times in an attempt to achieve exactly what he wants. The plays Die chinesische Mauer and Graf Öderland went through two versions and numerous minor revisions.

Like Dürrenmatt, Frisch never definitely names his

ideal thematic material. He calls for "eine Dramaturgie des Unglaubens; eine Dramatik der Permutation."* Frisch understands permutation to be any one of the possible combinations of events within a historical context. He illustrates his idea with Hitler's rise to power. One may regard such an event as destiny, when all it actually consisted of was a summation of related events. He considers any literary attempt "belletristic" which portrays a historical course of events as predestined. If a dramatist does not believe in Providence or in an unalterable course of history, he must look for a dramaturgy which accentuates the randomness of chance in events. By representing the possible combination of a group of events, the dramatist demonstrates the randomness of history rather than portraying history as destiny.

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* Max Frisch, "Der Autor und das Theater", Öffentlichkeit als Partner, p. 99.

Although this idea of permutation does not embrace a specific theme, it suggests that Frisch thinks plays should concern themselves with various possibilities and paths that historical events as well as personal lives could take. Frisch is interested in the combination of events, rather than the final outcome. Thematic material dealing with a drama of permutation is practically unlimited. Frisch does not propose to portray what should have been, but what might have been considering the combination of different factors. Nothing can be regarded as fate in this theory; everything depends on a unique grouping of variables.

Frisch's play Biographie offers an excellent example of a drama of permutation. The play concerns a middle-aged man who is given the opportunity to start his life over again from any point he chooses. He carefully weighs different events in his life, momentous occasions such as the day he received his doctorate degree, his induction into the army, or the time he met his future wife. He is aware that if he chooses to go back to any of these events, he can make different decisions and alter the course of his life. Frisch does justice to this fanciful idea in Biographie. In fact, one senses that this theme is a highly personal one for Frisch. In the end, even though the central character chooses not to go back and relive any part of his life, the audience realizes the flexibility of an individual's life. Not even personal lives are fixed, because choices made along the way lead to different outcomes. A drama which has permutation as a theme has two major implications. The first is that an individual is responsible to a certain extent for his own life. Secondly, it shows that although past history can not be changed, it can be viewed differently. One realizes its dependence on chance and random occurences.

Several of Frisch's plays deal with a theme frequently found in his novels, that is a search or an escape from an identity. Frisch does not specifically allude to identity as a theme in drama, but it could easily be seen as a variation on the theme of permutation. Burdened with one identity or reputation, how can one break out of a confining pattern and discover other possibilities? A search for identity has a here-and-now quality whereas the theme of history's contingency is based on the past and its relationship to the present. Frisch's play *Don Juan oder die Liebe zur Geometrie* concerns a person who wants to rid himself of his reputation as a great lover. He detests this stifling identity and yearns to pursue geomety, his genuine love. Frisch's plays and novels which treat his theoretical idea do not ususally fare as well as the theory. His novel *Stiller* is an obvious exception, because it conveys the idea of permutation very well. Once again, one senses that Frisch is pyschologically wrestling with the problem and he uses the dramatic medium to work it out. By putting his search for various possibilities on the the stage, perhaps he hopes to find a suitable identity and resolve the conflict.

### 3. Wolfgang Hildesheimer: Unreal and absurd occurrences

This section on Hildesheimer will be sketchy because most of his theory for dramaturgy concerns form rather than theme. Hildesheimer, a native German, identifies himself with the Theater of the Absurd. He sets down his basic theory of drama in his essay "Erlanger Rede über das absurde Theater".[7] Although he uses the term "absurd theater", I prefer using the more cumbersome appelation "Theater of the Absurd". An absurd theater implies that the theater as an institution is absurd, whereas Theater of the Absurd connotes one specific type of theater. According to Hildesheimer, what kind of themes does a play of the Theater of the Absurd have? To begin with, a theme should be contrary to the audience's usual expectations, which are "Probleme der Zeit, Menschen in der Zeit, Beziehungen zwischen Menschen"(p.340-341). Hildesheimer thinks that themes should show: "Die schmerzliche Tatsache, dass es keine wirklich Antwort gibt"(p.340).

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[7] Wolfgang Hildesheimer, "Erlanger Rede über das absurde Theater", Spectaculum, V.6. (Frankfurt a.M.:Suhrkamp, 1963).

A play in the Theater of the Absurd tries to bring the audience to the realization that the world they thought to be orderly and comfortable is actually chaotic and senseless:

> Ohnmacht und Zweifel, die Fremdheit der Welt, sind Sinn und Tendenz jedes absurden Stücks, das somit ein Beitrag zur Klarstellung der Situation des Menschen wird(p.343).

At the risk of overlapping into a discussion of the forms of Theater of the Absurd, it should be pointed out that Theater of the Absurd is often either ignored or denounced by other dramatists. In Werkstattgespräche with Horst Bienek, Frisch expressed his views on the Theater of the Absurd.* He finds it entertaining, which is fine, because theater should entertain. He continues by explaining that the more absurd something is on the stage, the more natural and digestible our reality appears. Hence we are entertained and need not think of the problems of the outside world. Frisch regards Theater of the Absurd as a pleasant, amusing diversion, as an escape, but not to be taken seriously. Frisch's play *Biedermann und die Brandstifter* is often interpreted as a play for the Theater of the Absurd, but this is really not the case. It tends more to parody absurdity in plays instead of patterning itself after Theater of the Absurd.

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* Horst Bienek, Werkstattgesprache, p.30.

## 4. Martin Walser: Burdens of the past

Martin Walser quite definitely expresses his opinion on what themes contemporary plays should have. He even began writing for the stage because he found that some themes, especially political ones, better lent themselves to portrayal on the stage than in a novel. Walser thinks that the purpose of a play is to show something about human behavior.[9] He does not propose to portray an ideal model or solution, but instead richness of character.

> Den Reichtum eines Charakters wird man zeigen dadurch, dass man ihn sehr verschiedenen Situationen oder Provokationen aussetzt(p.3).

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[9] Martin Walser, "Für einen neuen Realismus", *Theater heute*, 1(1965), p.3. Quotations and ideas from this source indicated by page numbers in parentheses.

Furthermore Walser wants to set the present against the past:

> Zeigen wir doch lieber, wie damals wirklich gehandelt wurde, und warum. Und zeigen wir, wie derselbe Mann heute handelt, und warum(p.4).

The play Eiche und Angora accomplishes exactly what Walser theoretically proposes. It shows the behavior of a group of villagers during the war. Among the soldiers, officers, and civilians is Alois, their prisioner. His cunning saves the regiment from death and dishonor. Nevertheless he remains their prisoner. The second half of the play takes place ten years later. The soldiers have returned to their civilian lives, but their behavior has changed little. Alois loves to sing and wanted to join the singing group. During wartime this was impossible, but ten years later he is still not allowed to join the community sing group. The play analyses the past and present behavior of the characters. Have they changed? Do they have a different outlook on things? How does the presence of their former prisoner affect their "Bewusstsein"? Eiche und Angora is a play which deals with the generation who experienced the war. This generation along with the post-war generation, who share the guilt of their parents, can watch the play together. Walser hopes that a conversation between father and son can arise.[10]

The confrontation between the past and the present forms another theme for Walser. He chooses this theme because he believes it imperative to bring a nation's "Bewusstsein" into the open. When the past, the war, and its results, the burdens of guilt, are portrayed on stage, it brings the matter out into the open for discussion. That is how I understand Walser's plan to bring the "Bewusstsein" of a nation onto the stage for examination. Only when both generations come to terms with the burden of the past, can the "Bewusstsein" be lived with.

Walser is the only post-war German dramatist who deliberately encourages the theme of the past and its consequences in the present. Moreover, he is very direct and realistic in the portrayal of this theme. He believes that such themes, as uncomfortable as they may be, are necessary for an honest understanding of a nation's conscience, as well as for insight to understanding individual character. I consider Walser's themes legitimate and worthwhile. He has proven that they can be effectively realized in the dramatic medium. He has ventured to handle a delicate, complex problem, namely, a nation's conscience. Although other dramatists have approached the problem,

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[10] Artur Joseph, Theater unter vier Augen, p.58.

Walser is the first German dramatist who has seriously and successfully handled it. It is all the better for Walser that he is German, because the problem of Germany's past can best be worked out and come to terms with by a German. Besides, his critics do not take into account that the impact and controversy of such a theme lessens with time, just as the sting and burden of guilt diminishes with each subsequent generation. Even though the theme may retain its compelling power, the emotional reaction to it decreases with time. Nevertheless, Walser's theme seems to be one the most pertinent themes for contemporary Germany.

### 5. Rolf Hochhuth: Man's entanglement in historical situations

Rolf Hochhuth also draws his thematic material from the past, but not for the same purpose as Walser. Whereas Walser compares a person's present behavior with his past actions, Hochhuth prefers to show man's behavior in a historical crisis-situation. He explains his choice of thematic material as follows:

> Geschichte also, darauf kommt es hier an, ist nicht das Primäre. Das Primäre ist das erregende Thema. Aber in diesen Zeiten ist es nun einmal die Geschichte, welche die erregenden Themen liefert.

> Geschichte liefert dem Stückeschreiber also die Stoffe nicht für die Darstellung von Problemen, sondern für die Darstellung von Menschen, die in Problemen verstrickt werden. Das Stoffliche als solches ist nie bühnenreif, auch kein einziges Dokument: es muss transparent gemacht werden auf Überstoffliches.[11]

Hochhuth does not consider history as the ideal theme, but man's entanglement in historical events. Hochhuth's statement also implies the difference between the historian and the poet. A historian relates historical data and shows the cause and effect relationship between the various events. A poet often concentrates on just one event which transcends the immediate subject matter and reflects the history of the time. The historian deals with documentary material, whereas the poet heightens and intensifies it for the stage. Hochhuth says that,

> Historic drama today is legitimate only when the author makes use of history merely as a blueprint from which to construct the behavior of our time.[12]

He does not want to reconstruct a past event, but strives for an explanation of man's behavior. Hochhuth hopes that the past behavior can shed light on man's behavior in the present age. It should be noted that Hochhuth regards man as a creature that does not basically change from age to age. Hochhuth maintains that any age which claims man significantly changes takes itself too seriously.[13]

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[11] "Hochhuths neue Provokation: Luftkrieg ist Verbrechen", Siegfried Melchinger spricht mit dem Dramatiker, _Theater heute_, 2(1967), p.8.

[12] Patricia Marx, "An Interview with Rolf Hochhuth", _Partisan Review_, (1964), p.366.

As previously stated, Hochhuth prefers to convey his theme of man's responsiblity for history through the dramatic medium. He considers drama to be better suited to marshal historical events toward a dramatic climax. Also, points of view can be made to clash more sharply in a drama than in a novel. This second reason is important to Hochhuth's dramatic theory because he sees drama as tied to theses, to conflicts of ideas. In many respects, Hochhuth's ideas are traditional. He wavers between writing morality plays and historical drama. In other respects, his ideas and attempts at their realization are innovative and deserve attention. One example of Hochhuth's interpretation of his theory in relation to the contemporary scene is his opinion of Theater of the Absurd. On several occasions, it was suggested to Hochhuth that he could invert some of the starkly realistic elements of his plays and modernize them into a surrealistic or absurd world. Hochhuth replied:

> Das Absurdeste, was es gibt aber ist nicht das absurde Theater, sondern laut Goethe, die

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[13] "Wie ist die heutige Welt auf dem Theater darzustellen? Eine Umfrage bei Dramatikern", *Theater heute*, (1963) Sonderheft, p.73.

> Geschichte. Und warhaftig, ihre Wirklichkeit...lässt sich nicht steigern durch Verlagerung in eine absurde Welt(p.74).

Hochhuth works out his themes with confidence and assurance. He shows no doubt or hesitation about their realization in drama. Experimentation in the avant-garde tradition is not for his theater. His themes are as traditional as Schiller's idea dramas. However, Hochhuth is a strange mixture of dramatist and historian. Historians consider him a writer of historical plays and literary people regard him as a historian who dabbles in playwriting. Many critics feel that his work has greater historical and moral value than artistic merit. Hochhuth defends his position as a playwright as he explains that he is not a historian, nor has he ever formally studied history. Circumstances simply led him to a confrontation of historical events.

I find the discrepancy between Hochhuth the dramatist and Hochhuth the theorist most perplexing. His theoretical ideas on drama are traditional and have proven feasible. When he attempts to apply them to his plays though, his efforts result in over-long, wordy plays. One of the shortcomings of his play Der Stellvertreter is its length. It was originally seven hours long and even after the play was condensed, it still tends to be drawn out. Hochhuth admits that novelists influenced him more than playwrights, and it shows in his plays, which read more like novels than dramas. It is unfortunate that Hochhuth writes such wordy plays because they would be even more powerful if they were more tersely written. Hochhuth is sincere in his theoretical statements and he has no intentions to mislead or to tease critics. For that reason, it is indeed unfortunate that he has not quite succeeded in realizing his theoretical ideas to their fullest in his dramatic portrayals.

## 6. Leopold Ahlsen: Basic questions of human existence

Another dramatist who considers man to be the focal point of a theme is Leopold Ahlsen. Ahlsen and Hochhuth have similar ideas regarding thematic material, although their plays widely differ. Hochhuth maintains that man in historic confrontations should be the theme for plays. Ahlsen expresses a related idea when he says that only the individual is relevant for the theater, his subjective reflection of the world in his "Bewusstsein". Both dramatists agree that man changes little from age to age. In fact, Ahlsen asserts that the changes man supposedly makes in the course of history are overrated. Man changes continually, explains Ahlsen, but also stays the same. It is merely a question of personal style whether a dramatist chooses to stress the one aspect of man over the other.[14]

Ahlsen continues that in any case, the eternal questions, the basic questions of human existence - birth, death, faith, doubt, love, hate, joy, and pain - are common to all men. When a dramatist chooses to stress the differences between men, he portrays an individual's answer to a certain age. The world is then indirectly portrayed on the stage by the impressions, reactions, and scars the world leaves with an individual. This idea seems to reflect Hochhuth's concept that the thematic material "muss transparent gemacht werden auf Überstoffliches"(p.71). In Ahlsen's concept of a theme, the outside world is mirrored by the marks it leaves on an individual.

While the theater has little chance to portray the world, it does have many opportunities to portray people, and Ahlsen takes this opportunity as his idea for a theme.

> Die immer neue, immer feinere Mikroskopie des Bewusstseins kann noch sehr erweitert werden: der Mensch ist ein vielseitiges, völlig unausschöpfbares Thema(p.71).

Ahlsen explains the popularity of Shakespeare over Ibsen in the light of this statement. The latter dealt with situations and problems, whereas Shakespeare dealt with people. Ahlsen does indeed deal with individuals in his dramas, as some of the titles suggest: *Philemon und Baucis* ; *Raskolnikoff* ; and *Der arme Mann Luther*.

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[14] "Wie ist die heutige Welt auf dem Theater darzustellen? Eine Umfrage bei Dramatikern", Theater heute, (1963) Sonderheft, p.71. Ideas and quotations from this source will be indicated by page numbers in parentheses.

The theoretical Ahlsen uses very general terms. He talks about portraying man and the basic questions of human existence. That theme could include almost anything, and taking his plays into consideration, it does. He goes from a commentary on war involvement in Greece circa 1944 to a portrayal of the sixteenth century reformer Luther. Perhaps Ahlsen was wise when he proposed a theme as general as man and questions of human existence. This theme includes almost everything. Only themes like those of Peter Weiss and Konrad Wünsche could not come under the theme of man. By doing this, Ahlsen lets his theory open for practically any possibility.

The basic questions of human existence has been a theme in art since the beginning of art itself. This theme lends itself equally well to portrayal in all media. A poem or a novel can pursue the theme just as well as drama can. Ahlsen's thematic ideas can not be considered as wrong or right, because without doubt, they concern every human being. The main objection one could raise to the theme is that it is too inclusive. One wishes that Ahlsen would be more specific. On the other hand, Ahlsen's theoretical approach allows for a great amount of freedom. Although he does not confine his theory within narrow limits, statements such as this one are disconcerting:

> Es gibt keine richtigen und falschen Kunstwerke, sondern nur gute und schlechte" (p.72).

The words good, bad, right, and wrong are problematic. Unfortunately, Ahlsen does not offer to define them. This seems to be a characteristic of Ahlsen's dramatic theory.

## 7. Peter Weiss: Historical events and their economic consequences

Historic themes serve as an expression for present-day conditions for the dramatist Peter Weiss.[15] He acknowledges his indebtedness to Brecht who also portrayed situations in history and the social discrepancies they caused. Weiss believes it is possible to revise history to make it relevant for the present-day. Although he admits that most plays which concern topical themes are short-lived, Weiss prudently notes that the true value or worth of a play can only be judged after a certain time. Anyway, Weiss claims he does not write for the future, but for the present. He chooses themes which can bring about an immediate change. In fact, his aim is:

> Die Situation, in der wir leben, so eindringlich zu schildern, dass die Leute, wenn sie es auf der Bühne erleben, auf dem Nachhausweg sagen: Das müssen wir ändern...[16]

One may not agree with Weiss' themes or goals, but his determination and optimism certainly merit admiration.

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[15] Artur Joseph, Theater unter vier Augen, p.64-65.

[16] "Dramatiker ohne Alternativen. Gespräch mit Peter Weiss", Theater heute, Sonderheft(1965), p.89.

Weiss lists in detail what he considers to be themes for the contemporary theater. He names a theme and its opposite:[17]

> 1. Die ungeheuerliche Vielfalt, das äusserst erweiterte Bewusstsein - Das Mikroskopische, die winzigen Variation im kleinsten Detail; 2. Die nüchterne aufklärende Schilderung allgemeingültiger Vorgänge - Das Unbestimmbare und Fliessende aller Vorgänge und die autistische Traumwelt; 3. Die Gegenüberstellung von Personen - Das Auftreten von Automaten; 4. Der absolute Augenblick - Die Aktualisierung einer der unzähligen Vergangenheiten.

The first theme implies a portrayal of the infintesimal against the totality of the world. Weiss wants to put on stage a simultaneous awareness of the outside world's enormity and the minutest detail of an inside world. This relates to Weiss' main theme, the urgency for change, by portraying the effect of the total world, its political and economic consequences, on the minutest detail of life.

With the second theme and counter-theme, Weiss suggests the outer, physical perceptions of events as opposed to inner, psychological impressions. "Die autistische Traumwelt" disregards external reality, it is concerned only with a state of mind, with day dreams and even hallucinations. This theme can not be made to agree with Weiss' demand for change. Actually this theme introduces an entire new set of possibilities for dramatic realization. means a new idea, for, the impressionists strived for an expression for the immediate Weiss realizes this theme to its full capacity in his play _Marat/Sade_. Not only is the setting in the nightmarish world of an insane asylum, but the action alternates between a serious, informative description of "allgemeingültiger Vorgänge", namely the narration of Marat's assassination, and a disconnected, vague dreamworld of the asylum. Weiss the theoretician is much more restricted and limited in his theoretical writing than in his dramatic work. He delves much deeper beneath the surface in his dramas than his superficial political dramaturgy suggests.

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[17] "Wie ist die heutige Welt auf dem Theater darzustellen? Eine Umfrage bei Dramatikern", Theater heute, (1963) Sonderheft, p.70.

The third theme which Weiss mentions easily falls under his political theme. He confronts familiar persons from family, social, and professional circles with machine-like human beings, who are not affected by conventional order. Finally Weiss talks of a theme which confronts a spontaneous event with one resulting from a culmination of past events. Weiss cites psychodrama, happenings, and role-playing as examples of on-the-spot events which can arise in the midst of a historically-burdened past.

Weiss follows in Brecht's footsteps when he talks of portraying social discrepancies on stage. The gap between the opposites should be shown to be so intolerably great that the audience will want to close the gap at once. The obvious shortcoming in Weiss' theory is his demand for instant change. Everyone becomes impatient with existing conditions, but change never comes rapidly. Even revolutions do not work their alledged transformations as quickly as revolutionaries claim. They merely force an outer change on a society. Wars, natural disasters, and legislation can alter events and conditions just as effectively as revolutions. Changing people's attitudes and ways of thinking is much more difficult, but also brings about a more permanent change. Weiss neglects this point in his theory, for he never explicitly acknowledges this fundamental prerequiste for change, namely, concentrating on changing attitudes before changing conditions.

## 8. Richard Hey: Impressions and Variations

Contrary to Peter Weiss, the dramatist Richard Hey thinks there is nothing left to protest against.[18] He believes that the great revolutions have been made, not only in politics, but also in the arts. The first thirty years of the twentieth century saw the great innovators in the arts, and each successive generation has had less to work with because the work of the early innovators was unsurpassable. The present generation has nothing to create or protest, because everything has already been discovered and unmasked. Brecht and Ionesco, for example, had a society that they could attack, they encountered resistance, which they overcame with a revolutionary ideology. Hey claims that whoever writes plays today no longer meets with resistance. The dramatist in the West sees tolerance on every side, and Hey rightly observes that tolerance is "kein dramatischer Motor"(p.254).

Hey thinks that the final stage of individualism has been reached in society. Actually, the last phase has been surpassed and the tendency away from the individual is beginning(p.255). The standard antithesis which dramatists have traditionally used, individual versus society, has been replaced by the undramatic situation of the specialist in the collective. Richard Hey is the only dramatist who has voiced this complaint. He is partly justified, because the western society has become "shock-proof" in the last two decades. Almost anything goes and nothing scandalizes in western society. However, Hey wrote these ideas in 1959 at the end of West Germany's amazing economic boom and some of his statements are outdated. In the following decade, dramatists succeeded in finding and even effectively using "protest" material. Documentary and political plays, which were virtually non-existent in Germany during the 1950's, won much acclaim in the 1960's. Nor has Hey's idea that the specialist would replace the individual in a collective has not substantially materialized.

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[18] Richard Hey, "Schreiben fürs Theater", Theater im Gespräch, p.252-253. Ideas and quotations from this source will be indicated by page numbers in parentheses.

Regarding his own themes, Hey speaks in generalities. He claims that he writes only about things he has not experienced. Once he has experienced a theme, it loses its potential as future thematic material. Because he has experienced relatively little, he reasons that "die Anzahl meiner Themen unbegrenzt (ist)"(p.245). Essentially, Hey says he uses his "Brennglas" or magnifying lens to concentrate on certain impressions or aspects of a theme which interest him at a particular moment. Hey concludes his introductory remarks by promising that he will talk less about his experiences and more about "Stimmungen, Assoziationen, Theorien, Variationen über (sein) Thema". Hey does indeed talk about moods and impressions, for he never clearly names what he considers appropriate themes for the contemporary theater(p.245). Hey's attitude toward themes is characteristic of the poetic theater which he advocates. Themes in poetic theater are of secondary importance; the variations on an idea and the impressions evoked by certain themes have greater significance than the topic which is treated.

In a 1962 interview, Hey speaks in somewhat more specific terms, but still does not name any satisfactory themes. The interviewer questions Hey concerning the east-west problem in his earlier plays. Hey admits that current events provided him with themes, but also adds, "Ich habe mich bemuht, sie moglichst schnell aus der Wirklichkeit unsere Tage herauszubringen".[19] He strives to write a play about our age, "ein Stück für unserer Zeit aus unserer Zeit zu machen"(p.36), which contains everything that affects us without confining itself to one viewpoint. He does not attempt to portray an image of reality, but wants to rearrange the elements of reality. Hey does not express anything more definite on the subject of themes; he simply alludes to themes without ever clearly outlining them.

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[19] "Ich lande immer in der Gegenwart", Henning Rischbieter spricht mit dem Dramatiker Richard Hey., Theater heute, 9(1962), p.36.

## 9. Konrad Wünsche: Conflict of speech and action

Konrad Wünsche's dramatic theory consists primarily of his ideas for an abstract theater. Since he devotes most of his theoretical writing to the form of abstract theater, his ideas will be treated more thoroughly in the next chapter. As previously stated, Wünsche does not think that drama should be a unity of speech and action. When a physical action contradicts the tone of voice, when a meaning of a word contradicts a gesture, only then does the entire drama appear.

> Wo die körperliche Tätigkeit dem Klang der Stimme oder wo die Bedeutung eines Wortes der Geste widerspricht, erscheint erst das ganze Drama; denn es sind nicht nur die Personen, die...in Konflikt geraten.[20]

Wünsche believes that "die bedeutendere Spannung...besteht zwischen dem, was wir dazu sagen, zwischen dem, was wir meinen zu empfinden, und dem, was unsere Sinne in

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[20] Konrad Wünsche, "Mein Ausgangspunkt ist die Rolle", *Theater heute*, 2(1964), p.54.

Wirklichkeit antreibt"(p.54).

Wünsche has chosen the best medium possible for this goal, because speech and action occur simultaneously in drama. The dramatist has the verbal element as well as the visual one to work with. Wünsche objects to a totally verbal theater because it encroaches on the emotional and physical elements of a drama. The speechless part of life has its role on the stage and Wünsche wants to assure it of its place. The elements of silent physical presence were always simultaneously existent and absent on the stage. They were present to the extent that they were often used as characteristics of a person and as means to make a story more authentic. The gestures often were incorporated into the verbal elements of the play and were essentially lost. Wünsche wants the elements to remain separate and keep their own autonomy. To achieve this goal, he chooses as a theme the conflict between speech and action.

> Mein Ausgangspunkt ist die Rolle, hergestellt aus dem, was in der Analyse des Schauspielens gefunden wurde, die Rolle, die darum stets zugleich stumm ist und redend, die Requisit ist und Fabel(p.54).

This conflict is the prime motivating factor in the theater; it initiates and sustains dramatic action. Action implies not only the physical movement of an actor on stage, but also the development of the plot. Several factors can put dramatic action into motion. In the traditional drama, a dialog between two actors starts the action. Actor A, for example, says, "The world will end tomorrow." If Actor B agrees, the dramatic action stops. If however, Actor B contradicts this statement, enlarges upon it, or questions it, the action continues.

When Wünsche proposes to make a theme from the separation of these two elements, he touches on an inner motivating point of drama in general. The implications of this theme have far-reaching consequences, and easily provide enough material for investigation as a topic in itself. What happens when a dramatist puts the traditional action-reaction situation into conflict? For one thing, the dialog, which is considered so necessary to drama, can be omitted. One actor then remains on stage. He can deliver a monolog, but that would create no dramatic tension. The dramatist has the option to initiate a conflict between the actor and his surroundings, or else he can replace the second actor but let their dialog contradict their surroundings. In Beckett's Waiting for Godot, the two tramps carry on a fragmented dialog throughout the play. In a traditional play, this dialog could succeed in initiating some dramatic action, although it would probably have caused minimal tension. Beckett, however, adds another factor - the tramps are waiting. The dialog contradicts the action. These two elements can be kept entirely separate from each other in an abstract theater, a traditional drama would be hard put to carry off the theme successfully.

# CHAPTER V

# FORMS

In an analysis of contemporary dramatic theory, a dramatist's statements about themes and aims of drama often lead to his main theoretical point, namely, how he proposes to realize a dramatic concept in a certain form. While form is a pattern which gives shape to dramatic action, dramatic style is a specific way of presentation or construction of the action. Form and style are interrelated and one usually has implications for the other.

## 1. Tragicomedy

The forms which playwrights propose for contemporary drama are varied. Friedrich Dürrenmatt thinks that a mixture between tragedy and comedy is the only suitable form for contemporary drama. He believes that tragedy is no longer possible because our age lacks true representatives, the tragic hero remains nameless. He explains: "Die

Tragödie setzt Schuld, Not, Mass, Übersicht, Verantwortung voraus"(p.122). The present-day world has no guilty or responsible people; instead, everyone bears a collective guilt. Dürrenmatt does not reject the tragic element; "Das Tragische (ist) immer noch möglich, auch wenn die reine Tragödie nicht mehr moglich ist."[1]

Dürrenmatt's tragicomical form holds a fascination which pure tragedy lacks. The juxtaposition of the serious with the comical can result in startling realizations. Although tragedy as a form is still feasible today, Dürrenmatt seems to be right when he maintains that tragicomedy is the most suitable form for contemporary drama. Dürrenmatt explains his device for having the tragic rise out of the comic:

> Wir können das Tragische aus der Komödie heraus erzielen, hervorbringen als einen schrecklichen Moment, als einen sich öffnenden Abgrund(p.123).

By using paradoxes in a comical setting, the tragic arises in sharp contrast to the humorous. Dürrenmatt's theory on paradox calls the grotesque "eine äusserste Stilisierung", an abrupt way of making things visual(p.123). Dürrenmatt uses the grotesque as a means to portray the world, because the world's paradoxes become acutely visible through the grotesque. Dürrenmatt's use of the tragicomical form appears in most of his plays. Comic elements are mixed with serious concerns to give a strange grotesque effect. In Der Besuch der alten Dame, the play's protagonist, Alfred Ill, is simultaneously a tragic and comic figure. The tragic element comes out stronger at the play's ending, however, as Alfred courageously dies.

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[1] Friedrich Dürrenmatt, "Theaterprobleme", Theater-Schriften und Reden, (Zürich: Die Arche Verlag, 1966),p.120-122. Quotations and ideas from this source indicated by page numbers in parentheses.

Dürrenmatt gives a second reason for using comic elements in a tragic situation. He wants to tempt the audience into coming to the theater so he can reveal the tragic, serious nature of the world. He calls comedy a "Mausefalle", in which he can repeatedly catch the audience(p.124). By presenting the play in a comic form, Dürrenmatt can trick the audience into listening to things it would otherwise not so readily hear. Although Dürrenmatt is not always serious in his theory, I believe it is safe to say that he is sincere in his ideas for the use of comedy. He recognizes the time-proven truth that the best way to win people's attention is to entertain them. Dürrenmatt wants to instil an awareness in the audience and make them cognizant of the seriousness in the world as well as its comic nature.

Dürrenmatt does not use pure tragedy because it takes itself too seriously. The contemporary audience no longer has the kind of "Bewusstsein" which accepts a tragic presentation. Comedy, on the other hand, does not take itself seriously. Dürrenmatt calls the comic form the form of the "bewusste Kunst".[2] However, art forms are usually far ahead of the public, and the new "aware art" is no exception. Dürrenmatt says that the audience takes everything it sees on the stage too seriously. In his article in Sinn und Form, he explains why he finds it necessary to teach the audience humor:

> Die Erziehung des Menschengeschlechts zum Humor, das ist für mich gleichbedeutend mit der Erziehung des Menschens. Es gibt keine Humanität ohne Humor (p. 1224-1225).

Dürrenmatt concludes with the idea that humanity does not exist without humor. Humor does not imply agreement with the world, but an acceptance of it as something questionable.

Dürrenmatt's theoretical writing on the theater and drama reveals his thinking about the world as well as his dramaturgy. An analysis of his statements has seen the progression from his refusal as a dramatist to explain anything about the world to a confession that he is, after all, a moralist.[3] Dürrenmatt wants to teach the public humanity by using humor. He is very aware of his role as a dramatist and the possibilities he has to work with, although he does not want the audience to know his position. Dürrenmatt's theory contains a great deal of common sense. He sets down the obvious in very simple terms. Such simplicity in stating the obvious usually lies behind most of the world's lasting theories. Dürrenmatt has successfully sifted through the chaos of the present-day world and has set down a feasible and hopefully enduring theory for the German theater since the war.

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[2] "Gespräch mit Friedrich Dürrenmatt", Sinn und Form, (1966) Heft 4, p. 1224.

## 2.Political theater: Documentary drama and thesis plays

Political theater is older than the term, which goes back to Erwin Piscator's book Das politische Theater in

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[3] Friedrich Dürrenmatt, "Anmerkung zur Komödie", Theater-Schriften und Reden, p.137.

1929.[4] Politics - the methods, principles, and organization of governments - has comprised the theme of every age. One form of political drama in the twentieth century is the documentary theater. Documentary theater does not concern individual experience or a personal story but portrays a general social situation. The themes of documentary theater are usually of a historical or political nature and are derived from public documents, records, press reports, and trial proceedings. Photographs, films, and tape recordings add the desired simulation of authenticity to the stage production. Documentary plays inform the audience about political and economic events and also give their historical causes as well. Besides it's didactic purpose, documentary theater criticizes and agitates. In fact, documentary plays and "agit-prop"[5] plays go back to the Russian revolution theater and Piscator's spectacular political productions. Another form of political drama is the "living newspaper", a dramatic developement which patterned itself after a newspaper's style of reporting, also became a popular dramatic form in Europe as well as in America.[6] "Living newspapers", financed by the American Federal Theater, appeared in the United States during the depression years. The plays examined contemporary social, economic, and political issues of the country. Because of the expression of liberal political views in the living newspapers, Congress refused to appropriate money to continue the project( _Century of Innovation_,p.503). The form of the living newspaper presented a realistic, stylized portrayal of the news of the day but had no smoothly-woven plot. Dramatic scenes were alternated with film clips, slide projections, and illustrations.

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[4] see Henning Rischbieter,ed., *Friedrichs Theaterlexikon*, (Velber bei Hannover: Friedrich Verlag, 1969), p.327.

[5] The word "agit-prop" is a combination of agitation and propaganda. Agit-prop theater was especially popular in Russia in the 1920's and appeared also in Germany.

In short, documentary theater is not a new form of theater. It has been a popular form at different times since the beginning of the twentieth century. The student uprisings in the late 1960's, the formulation of an anti-authoritarian and anti-capitalistic left, and general discontent with existing political systems led to a revival of the agit-prop theater and street theater. The 1960's witnessed a rebirth of documentary theater with the appearance of Rolf Hochhuth's _Der Stellvertreter_ (1962) and _Soldaten_ (1967); Heinar Kipphardt's _In der Sache J. Robert_

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[6] Brockett and Findlay explain that the term "living newspaper" originated after the Russian Revolution when newspapers were scarce and the practice of reading news items from the stage was popular. Oscar Brockett and Robert Findlay, _Century of Innovation_, p. 316.

*Oppenheimer* (1964); Peter Weiss' *Ermittlung* (1965), *Gesang vom lusitanischen Popanz* (1967), and *Diskurs über Vietnam* (1968) as well as Tankred Dorst's *Toller* (1968).

A drama of ideas, or a thesis play, is not necessarily a form of political drama. It provides a thought-provoking discussion of ideas which often concern topical social conditions. The actors advance conflicting ideas and debate the merits and shortcomings of the ideas. Distinctions between a drama of ideas, a thesis play, and a problem play are rarely sharply defined. One could differentiate between the two forms by saying that a problem play poses a problem and a thesis play offers a solution. Rolf Hochhuth, who writes political plays which are also thesis plays, repudiates the claim that anyone who writes historical drama simply relates an eye-witness account by writing historical documents. "Reportage" or documentation should be more than just an account of events, it should be:

> Was sie seit Herodot und Sophokles stets gewesen ist: ein nicht nur legitimes, sondern unentbehrliches Grundelement aller nicht-lyrischen Dichtung.[7]

Hochhuth's statement that documentation is not just an account of events demonstrates an understanding of political drama. Documentation is a selective account and one which usually supports a certain ideological way of thinking. Hochhuth's dramatic theory is relatively non-political. He sees the answer to the world's conflicts in man, not politics. Hence his "documentary" plays do not have political bias.

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[7] "Wie ist die heutige Welt auf dem Theater darzustellen? Eine Umfrage bei Dramatikern", *Theater heute*, Sonderheft (1963), p.74.

In the preface to his play, In der Sache J. Robert Oppenheimer, Heinar Kipphardt also emphasizes that his play is for the stage and not just an assemblage of documentary material. Whereas Hochhuth adds fictional characters and scenes to his plays, Kipphardt adheres strictly to the documents and reports which concern his play. He proposes to present a version which lends itself to staging without distorting the truth. Kipphardt hopes to reveal the core and significance of a historical event in all clarity. Such an endeavor is extremely difficult. No matter how a writer may try to present an unbiased view of history, he remains influenced in some way or another. Kipphardt unintentionally explains why unbiased documentary theater is so difficult to obtain when he explains his guidelines for writing his play.

> The author exercised his freedom only in the selection, the arrangement, formulation and condensation of the material. The selection and

emphasis of facts ultimately rests with the author.*

The documentation of history is not an exact science. One can not so objectively study man's history as a physicist, for example, studies gravity. When an author examines documents from a historical event, he makes a judgement, whether he intends to or not. He portrays some characters or actions in a more sympathetic light than others. Kipphardt also states in his preface that "some filling-in and intensification was necessary to achieve a more tightly-knit...documentation...and as such more appropriate for the stage"( _Ibid_ ). Political and documentary material do not necessarily lose their truthful nature when put on the stage, for Peter Weiss' _Gesang vom lusitanischen Popanz_ and Kipphardt's _In der Sache J. Robert Oppenheimer_ are excellent examples of thesis plays in which questions are posed, debated, and in the first case, left unresolved. The point I wish to make is that it is highly unlikely that dramatists present the unbiased truth on stage when they claim that they do.

Handke's idea on politically committed literature applies very well in a discussion of documentary material on stage. He says that once an event is put on stage, it becomes play and loses its effectiveness. The striving for engagement and clarity of historical events fails; it misleads the audience by misrepresenting the situation. Handke cites Brecht's plays in which the conflicts are a pure matter of form - they have significance only as a device in the play. Handke's realization is of paramount importance for the political theater. Dramatists who fervently advocate the documentary political play do not give a complete account of events. The danger arises whenever the audience accepts the plays as complete and accurate accounts of an event. Dürrenmatt's words of caution should be heeded especially in the form of the political theater. The audience should not accept the world as it is, but it should view society and the world as something to question.[9]

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* Heinar Kipphardt, _In the Matter of J. Robert Oppenheimer_, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1968), Trans. by Ruth Speirs.

Tankred Dorst's play Toller offers another good example of a political play which supports no party line or ideology. In Toller, Dorst shows the behavior of intellectuals in revolutionary eras. The revolutionary ideas originate with the poets and the poets sometimes become leaders of revolutionary movements. At the same time, intellectuals tend to shirk from violence and thereby condemn their own dreams. Dorst realizes that he is biased in his portrayal of Toller as he confesses: "Natürlich gehört meine Sympathie...dem Toller."[10] Dorst demonstrates a sound understanding of the problem play. He presents a problem which has plagued revolutionary writers for a long time, but he admits that he can not solve the dilemma. By presenting the pros and cons of an intellectual who advocates revolutionary action, Dorst does the problem more justice than by just giving a definite solution.

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[9] "Gespräch mit Friedrich Dürrenmatt", Sinn und Form, (1966) Heft 4, p.1225.

Peter Weiss could be considered ~~to~~ be *the* political dramatist of the contemporary West German theater. Weiss considers political engagement the primary business of a dramatist. He has set down fourteen points in notes which outline his ideas on political theater, specifically documentary theater, which he defines as theater concerned exclusively with the documentation of material.[11] Concerning source material, Weiss writes:

> Das dokumentarische Theater...übernimmt authentisches Material und gibt es, unverändert, in

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[10] Tankred Dorst, "Die Revolution ist doch kein Kinderspiel", *Emuna*, 4(1969), p.5.

[11] Peter Weiss, "Das Material und die Modelle", *Dramen 2*, (Frankfurt a.M,: Suhrkamp, 1968), p. 464, . Subsequent quotations from this source will be noted by page numbers in parentheses.

> der Form bearbeitet, von der Buhne aus wieder(p.468).

Contrary to the barrage of unordered information, Weiss says that documentary theater shows a critical selection of material which concentrates on a social or political theme. The purpose of documentary theater is to unmask lies and falsified facts. It should also unmask cover-ups of political information and should attack the mass media, which cooperate with the political cover-up maneuvers.

Weiss recognizes the necessity for artistic accomplishment. Drama should not only be a political forum:

> Erst wenn es durch seine sondierende, kontrollierende, kritisierende Tätigkeit erfahrenen Wirklichkeitsstoff zum künstlerischen Mittel umfunktioniert hat, kann es volle Gültigkeit in der Auseinandersetzung mit der Realität gewinnen(p.467-468).

Only on such a stage can the documentary theater become an instrument to mold public opinion. Weiss states that the strength of the documentary theater lies in its position as an observer and analyst. It is a biased theater which demands that the audience take sides. The source material should be reworked. Public figures should be caricatured and situations drastically simplified. Weiss' documentary theater opposes dramatists who indulge in writing about individual conflicts.

> Das dokumentarische Theater (wendet sich) gegen die Dramatik, die ihre eigene Verzweifelung und Wut zum Hauptthema hat und festhält an der Konzeption einer ausweglosen und absurden Welt (p.472).

Weiss concludes his fourteen points by explaining that documentary theater offers an alternative, he believes that reality can be explained in every single detail.

One cannot help being influenced by Weiss' ideas. The idea that documentary theater should stand as a protest against mass media's cover-up of information has special appeal. People have come to realize that facts are covered up in government circles and international affairs. Events which actually cause history do not always make the newspaper. Weiss' proposal to put the mass media into question is an excellent one. His clearly defined proposals for action appeal to a public which wants immediate change. Weiss offers black and white answers. He intends to use the same tactics advertising, mass media and political powers use to persuade people.

These theoretical proposals of Weiss' seem incredibly naive; he puts everything in simplified terms. In plays such as Die Ermittlung, Diskurs über Vietnam, and Gesang vom lusitanischen Popanz he oversimplifies political events to the point where any serious political discussion or solution loses its effectiveness. Weiss' goals are basically sound but his proposals to attain them are dangerous. He wants to expose sham by reducing everything to a black or white situation. In doing this, he uses the same means used by the powers he is attacking. Some of Weiss' audience have been exposed to this kind of theater during the Nazi era. They should be the first to see through Weiss' documentary theater. Weiss' theoretical ideas for a political theater should be carefully examined and thought-out before they are put into practice.

### 3. Theater of the Absurd

The form, themes, and goals of the Theater of the Absurd are opposite to those of the political theater. The absurdist tradition did not originate in Germany, but stems from France. Albert Camus used the term "absurd" to describe a certain type of theater in his work The Myth of Sisyphus (1942). In an attempt to bring order to an irrational world, man confronts the absurdity of the world. Camus concludes that human existence has no rational basis but that man can and must overcome absurdity. Camus believes man still capable of determining his own destiny and overcoming the vicissitudes of a chaotic universe. The absurdists, Camus' successors, adapted only one side of his idea. They accepted only the irrational, indifferent universe and rejected the concept that a way out of the absurd condition could exist.[12]

Theater of the Absurd plays follow a certain pattern. A cause and effect relationship between incidents disappears. Action tends to be circular rather than linear. The action may be intensified but seldom progresses in time or space. Nor does language play its traditionally important role in absurdist drama. Instead of conveying the play's idea or action, language is sometimes reduced to jibberish or platitudes. Of course, this treatment of speech carries a message about language and its misuse, but language becomes a target for criticism rather than an information medium. Characters tend toward stereotypes or caricatures rather than individual personalities. Man's entrapment in a void, meaningless world is usually the theme of absurdist plays. Beckett, Ionesco, Genet, and Adamov are leading proponents of the Theater of the Absurd. Beckett's play _Waiting for Godot_ was not the first absurdist play, but it was the first to gain world-wide recognition. Absurdism in the theater was never a clearly defined movement, but Martin Esslin popularized the term in his book _The Theatre_

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[12] Albert Camus, _The Myth of Sisyphus_, Translated from the French by Justin O'Brien. (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1962), p.77-84.

*of the Absurd* (1962).[13]

Theater of the Absurd plays enjoyed success in West Germany. Their popularity may have resulted from the parallel Germany drew between the absurdist plays and its own condition in the immediate post-war period. Although West Germany readily accepted the absurdist tradition, few native writers wrote in the absurdist vein. Wolfgang Hildesheimer and Günter Grass are the only German dramatists who followed the School of the Absurd.

In his "Erlanger Rede" defending an absurdist theater, Hildesheimer denies that it is a revolt against traditional forms of theater. He considers the Theater of the Absurd a philosophical theater, a revolt against conventional outlooks on life. It is philosophical in that it contemplates man's condition in life. Absurdist plays should confront the audience with the irrationality of the world, they should present a state without offering a solution. Hildesheimer especially emphasizes the necessity to make the audience aware of their helplessness. He assumes a priori that his audiences are smug and complacent.

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[13] Oscar Brockett and Robert Findlay discuss the French absurdists more thoroughly in *Century of Innovation*, (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1973), p.591-602.

They should see plays which upset their ordered worlds and startle them into recognition of their helpless condition.

At the end of his essay on absurd theater, Hildesheimer draws a parallel between the Theater of the Absurd and traditional drama.

> Das absurde Theater ist eine Parabel über die Fremdheit des Menschen in der Welt. Sein Spiel dient daher der Verfremdung. Es ist ihre letzte und radikale Konsequenz. Und Verfremdung bedeutet Spiel im besten, wahrsten und im altesten Sinne.[14]

Estrangement may be one of the oldest and main purposes of drama yet drama never before portrayed man in a completely alienated state. Man always had some order around which to center his life, whether it was divine order, reason, or nature. Hildesheimers's attempt at reconciling absurdist drama with traditional drama does not strengthen his defense. He sees Theater of the Absurd as a creative, philosophical theater where an answer or solution is unnecessary. Epic and Aristotelian plays offer a solution or an ending, whereas absurdist plays present a condition which remains a question. Throughout his essay Hildesheimer compares a Theater of the Absurd play to a parable, but one without a clear message. Absurdist theater is philosophical in that it is a parable of the world's meaninglessness and indifference.

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[14] Wolfgang Hildesheimer, "Erlanger Rede über das absurde Theater",V.6 Spectaculum, (Frankfurt a M.: Suhrkamp, 1963), p.346.

Günter Grass also wrote plays in the absurdist tradition but they are vague in their intention. Some of Grass' plays which belong to the Theater of the Absurd are Hochwasser (1959); Onkel, Onkel (1958); and Noch zehn Minuten bis Buffalo (1959). Grass has not accompanied his plays with any formal theory on Theater of the Absurd. His strong point lies in his novels rather than in drama. Grass will simply be mentioned as a German dramatist who has written for Theater of the Absurd. It is interesting to note that Grass' dramatic interests changed in the mid-sixties as he actively entered into national politics.

## 4. New Forms for an Abstract Theater

The term "abstract" used in connection with the theater often suggests experimentation and avant-gardism. "Abstract" also brings to mind dancing, painting, and music - art forms in which the term is more commonly applied. In an attempt to become abstract, the theater has orientated itself toward simpler structures in other art forms. As playwrights search for models outside the theater, painting and music take on a new significance for the theater. Endeavors to copy techniques in abstract painting produced unsatisfactory results. Nor did music and ballet produce the right forms for an abstract theater.

Konrad Wünsche attributes the failure of the initial attempts of synthesizing abstract art forms into the theater to neglect of the verbal element. When asked in an interview whether the radio play would not be the ideal medium for an abstract play, Wunsche replied

> Nein, denn die Versetzung der Stimme ins Hörspiel befreit sie nicht nur vom Körper, sondern verändert die Stimmung selbst auf vielerlei Weise.[15]

Without the presence of the visual element, the listener's eye wanders. The radio play offers possibilities of its own; it is not merely "abgeschwächtes Theater". The verbal in conjunction with the visual gives the physical significance in abstract theater. Both elements are necessary. If one is deleted, the attempt at abstractness fails.

The abstract is more difficult to achieve in the theater than in other art forms because the stage needs actors and they do not have the pure or absolute quality which musical tones or colors have. The responsibility for conveying a play lies with the actor who has an individual personality and varying moods. This has long been a central problem for dramatists who strived for a "pure" form in theater. A dualistic relationship always exists between an actor's true self and the role he enacts. Theater in the nineteenth century resolved the tension by encouraging the actor to identify with the role he portrayed and to actually become that character. Brecht fought against this type of acting. He demanded that his actors retain their individual personalities and simply play their roles as if they were narrating them. The abstract theater avoids both extremes by relegating the actor to a mechanical part of the stage. Wünsche discusses the problem of how to retain the verbal element and what to do with the actor's body(p.4-6). If one aims at a purely verbal play, then all physical elements of the actor must be deemphasized: the body, the personal identity, the character, as well as the opportunity to be a partner in the dramatic action.

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[15] Konrad Wünsche, "Plädoyer für ein abstraktes Theater", Theater heute, 1(1969),p.2. Subsequent quotations from this source indicated in parentheses.

Wünsche cites Jean Tardieu's plays as successful abstract plays. Tardieu manages to retain the necessary verbal element while "disposing" of the bodies. In his play The Sonata and the Three Gentlemen, or How to Speak Music (1955), Tardieu uses the sonata form in which three unnamed characters converse about an undefined subject. Three movements (largo, andante, and finale) comprise the play, each having the proper tempo and mood. Wünsche observes that Tardieu solves the central problem of what to do with the actors' physical presence by having the men rearrange their chairs for each movement. In the stage directions for another abstract play, Conversation Sinfonietta, Tardieu gives the following instructions for the actors. They should:

> Speak as far as possible without any singing tones in their voices, using effects of rhythm and intensity. They do not 'act' the meaning of what they say, they render the sound, like instruments. There is, then, a contrast between their words and their attitudes...[16]

Wünsche also cites Beckett's Play where Beckett solved the problem of the actors' bodies in a verbal play by concealing them in urns.

Plot and subject take on different functions in abstract theater. They become motives, features, of form rather than objectives. Form dominates. An abstract theater does not deny the subject in a play, but regards it as a phenomenon of form. The plot, which is the usual transporter of action in non-abstract theater, becomes a motive of physical action in the abstract play. The dialog becomes a motif of articulation. Characters speak dialogs that recreate the rhythms and effect of daily speech but in which controlled silences and an unspoken "subtext" are as important as what is verbalized. The traditional genres of drama no longer suffice for abstract theater. Wünsche suggests new forms could be called "Variation, Reihe, Kreis"(p.2).

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[16] Jean Tardieu, The Underground Lovers and Other Experimental Plays, trans. by Colin Duckworth, (London: Allen and Unwin, 1968), p.120.

Jean Tardieu explains abstract theater in a similar way in the preface to The Underground Lovers and Other Experimental Plays (p.vi).

> The apprentice dramatist is very tempted to tackle theater by its means rather than its ends; to be more interested in the "scenic object" than in the subject of the play; to begin each time with motives of form, and only afterwards to try and fit into this framework meanings and values; in short, he is tempted to seek the human by and through the ritual element.

Like Wunsche, Tardieu also rejects the popular forms of drama and suggests new classifications. He proposes for example "Comedies of Language", "Monologues and Dialogues", "Dream and Nightmare", and "Accelerated Time". As these titles suggest, abstract theater aims at the presentation of an image, an idea, rather than a concrete picture.

It is noteworthy that neither Wünsche nor Tardieu use the term "absurd" although their examples of abstract plays contain absurd elements. Beckett's Play and Tardieu's Sonata are often included under the heading of Theater of the Absurd, but the latter is not absurd in form or purpose. The play's intention determines whether it is abstract or absurd. If the dramatist wants to show the absurdity of man's confrontation with his existence, the play will be classified under Theater of the Absurd. The abstract theater does not aim at portraying an irrational, indifferent universe. It is true that the abstract theater and Theater of the Absurd share common traits. Silence, for example, is an important element to both types of theater, for silence must be made visible in the abstract theater and be recognized amid sound in the absurdist play. Although "visible" or "audible" silences are more threatening in the absurdist play than in the abstract one, they form a crucial element in both theatrical forms.

In writing for the abstract theater, Wünsche says that the role is his starting point. He expects the actor to make the contrast between the silent and the spoken elements visible in the role he plays. Wünsche suggests that as a dramatist, he creates a role, which has the potential for horizontal and vertical action; it is the actor's responsibility to bring out the contrast. Wünsche sees the duality of the actor, his stage personality versus his true personality, as the main problem to be solved in abstract theater. He cites various solutions dramatists have employed to overcome the split nature of the actor. One solution calls for the actor to become part of the total effect the play produces. He is neither a puppet nor does he live his current role, instead he integrates himself into the stage picture as a balanced part of the whole. He must not be the central focus of attention but takes his place along side the props, lighting, and sound effects. The individual elements, animate as well as inaminate, must make "das Ganze ein Feld von Wirkungen, von zentrifugalen und rotierenden Kräften, die Szene als Exhibition."[17]

Another solution to the problem of the "teilbare Schauspieler" is to make a play out of a summation of scenes, a "theater of discontinuity". Wünsche compares the play to an exhibition, suggestive of a painting exhibition, in which each scene or picture adds to the over-all impression. He ends his article with the eventual aim of the abstract theater. These various attempts at integrating the actor into the play are to bring about "einen gewissen Fortschritt unserem Wahrnehmungsmöglichkeiten" ("Plädoyer für ein abstraktes Theater",p.6). The responsibility for the success of abstract theater lies with the actor. He must overcome his own consciousness as an individual personality in order to integrate himself into the total theatrical scene. If he succeeds, Wünsche hopes the audience will become more alert and aware, presumably of their own actions.

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[17] Konrad Wünsche, "Mein Ausgangspunkt ist die Rolle", p.54.

## 5. Poetic Theater

The poetic drama uses lyrical rather than prosaic dialog. It often deals with antitheses and the reconciliation between opposite concepts such as life and death, peace and war, or the absolute and the ephemeral. Allusions and perceptions rather than direct argumentation characterizes poetic drama. T.S. Eliot's _Murder in the Cathedral_, Chrisopher Fry's _The Lady's not for Burning_, and Jean Giraudoux's _Ondine_ and _Amphitryon 38_ are examples of twentieth century poetic drama. In a discussion of the poetic theater in _Tendenzen der deutschen Literatur seit 1945_, Thomas Koebner states it has had a far-reaching influence.[18] It united the bourgeois play and the demand for classicism by softening the expression, lyricizing the speaking manner, versifying prose and slurring contradictions. Unlike the Theater of the Absurd, the poetical theater revealed the unusual elements behind the everyday instead of the threatening. It aimed at cultivating a humane, educated attitude toward the world. The East German critics and West German Socialists strongly denounced the poetic theater as decadent. In retrospect, the West German critics of the 1960's also formed the opinion that the poetic theater advocated a political alienation and a conservative yearning for permanence.

Richard Hey discusses the "poetische Theater" in his essay "Schreiben fürs Theater". As previously stated, Hey believes the dramatist no longer has anything to protest. The reality of the present-day world no longer has anything to search for in the theater, nor can the theater be used as a vehicle for political or psychological information. Furthermore, Hey considers the mastery of the real world on stage superfluous. Once an event is staged, it becomes a type of "Übertheater". This idea parallels Handke's idea on the staging of real events. He too believes that once an event is put on stage, it is distorted and no longer has its true meaning.

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[18] Thomas Koebner, "Dramatik und Dramaturgie seit 1945", Tendenzen der deutschen Literatur seit 1945. ed. Thomas Koebner, (Stuttgart: Kröner Verlag, 1971), p.416-417. 1972), p.416-417.

A dramatist of the contemporary stage has two alternatives, according to Hey. He can choose to portray the world that once existed, a world which based itself on religious beliefs and moral values. In short, he can preserve a world on stage. Or he can choose to write for a theater which gives no answers or solutions, but offers "Bausteine" instead of answers. In the latter case, a "Theater aus Gedanken" would result. Hey adds: "Ich könnte auch sagen...dialektisches oder noch besser:poetisches Theater."[19] In poetical theater, Hey proposes to make something visible. He sees it as an answer to the scientific and technological world. A poetical theater should go beneath the scientific surface and reach the specialists and bureaucrats, all the people who can not see beyond their own narrow worlds. Portraying a realistic world no longer suffices. Theater should delve beneath the outer surface to reveal moods and feelings. He suggests that the arts are moving in the direction of a new romaticism.

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[19] Richard Hey, "Schreiben fürs Theater, p.259.

Hey attributes the dilemma the dramatist finds himself in to the shift of focal points. Man no longer devotes his thoughts to the afterlife, but concentrates on the mastery and bettering of his present state. Unlike Dürrenmatt, Hey rejects the alternative that theater can justify its existence as pure entertainment. Hey argues that the other media, especially cinema, can entertain far better than theater(p.259).

## 6. Martin Walser's "Realismus X"

So far, unrealistic styles and forms of the theater have been examined. It is generally agreed that Theater of the Absurd, abstract theater, and the poetic theater do not represent a true picture of everyday life. Tragicomedy and the political theater are considered more realistic, because they supposedly reflect real life more accurately. This assumption implies that tragicomedy and political or documentary drama portray the world in a more proportionate mixture than the other forms which emphasize only one aspect of life. Martin Walser, however, calls all the above-mentioned attempts at realistic theater idealistic.[20]

Martin Walser writes about Realism in theoretical essays such as "Für einen neuen Realismus", "Ein Tagtraum vom Theater", and "Ein weiterer Tagtraum vom Theater". He is aware of the many different connotations and definitions of Realism. He cautions that: "Realismus gibt es auf zu vielen Wellenlängen, deshalb sollte man darauf keinen Kanon bauen."[21] Walser proposes a new Realism, one that goes beyond a mere objective representation of the world. Along with Handke and Hey, Walser recognizes that the staging of reality all too often distorts it. The idea that the world can be faithfully reproduced on stage goes back to the rise of the bourgeois concept of art. Walser explains that the bourgeois dramatists made a division between art and life, the outside world being life and the inside realm of the theater being art. Furthermore, Walser calls for an abolition of the division between art and the theater. Theater should not be an imitation of the world, but should have a reality apart from the world.

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[20] Martin Walser, "Ein weiterer Tagtraum vom Theater"(1967), *Heimatkunde. Aufsätze und Reden*, p. 71-84. Subsequent quotations from this source indicated by page numbers in parentheses.

> Ich sähe gern das Theater befreit von seinen Kunstzwängen und Abbildungslasten...Die Selbständigkeit der Theateraufführung gegenüber allem realen Vorkommen sollte angestrebt werden(p.75).

Walser thinks that theater imitates life more today than ever before. The audience has been so conditioned to accept imitation of life in the theater that it does not reject or disapprove of what it sees. Furthermore, the contemporary audience accepts imitation of reality as natural. Even documentary and parable plays separate the stage from reality, Walser explains, because they simulate reality. Only when the theater is freed from its burden of imitation, will the condition arise that "was auf der Bühne gespielt wird, selber Wirklichkeit ist."

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[21] "Wie ist die heutige Welt auf dem Theater darzustellen? Eine Umfrage bei Dramatikern", Theater heute, Sonderheft (1963), p.69.

Walser looks to the play's main concern for the answer to his new Realism. Plays should be the developement and expression of the author's "Bewusstsein"(p.79). In place of a standard plot; Walser states: "Stagnation, diskontinuierliche Idylle, montierte Kontrastfetzen taugte eher als 'Handlung"(p.81). These suggestions for main concerns in plays do not aim at changing anything, but instead to give insight into situations.

Along with new plot situations, new Realism also needs different kinds of characters. Walser rejects the idea that characters should be made "true-to-life"(p.82). They should instead be made to act from their "Bewusstsein". A character should behave as unpredictably and inconsistently on stage as people do in reality. Stereotypes would disappear and a fictitious character would be as complex as a real person. The "Bewusstsein" does not imitate itself, but expresses itself. Therefore, when a dramatist writes from his "Bewusstsein", plays become "ein Stück verzichteten Lebens oder eiternder Hoffnung oder zurückschlagender

Angst". A play could be more politically effective if it were written out of an author's "Bewusstsein"(p.84), instead of simulating a political event. Walser warns of several difficulties which may be encountered by an author writing in the style of new Realism. Proponents of traditional Realism may accuse him of being an "Irrealist". Also, the public may object to the new Realism because it takes away the comforting ritualistic nature of theater. They may prefer the illusion of reality to the real "Bewusstsein".

Walser admits that his theoretical proposals do not yet exist, but they are imminent. Thus, he calls his proposal "Realismus X".[22] The audience witnesses only an illusion of Realism. Walser supports this statement by citing what happens to an experienced dramatist. The older a dramatist becomes, the more one idea predominates in his "Bewusstsein". He eventually portrays the world in the light of that one idea. It would suffice to write a monolog, but the writer has learned to conceal his idea in the guise of dialog. Any chance for a confrontation of the dramatist's "Bewusstsein" with the world disappears, since he has decided in favor of one viewpoint. At this stage, the dramatist is no longer a realist.

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[22] Martin Walser, "Für einen neuen Realismus", Theater heute,1(1965), p.3. All quotations from this article will noted by a page number in parentheses.

Every exclusive attempt at explaining the world is a form of idealism. A new Realism is needed after each attempt. Old viewpoints must be swept away in a continual reviewing and renewing process. Walser hopes that every new Realism "wird einen weiteren Schritt ermöglichen zur Überwindung ideenhafter, idealistischer Betrachtungsweise"(p.3). As a first step in instituting a new Realism, Walser proposes a rehabilitation of subject matter. His ideal thematic material, portrayal of the "Bewusstsein", should give a better understanding of a person's behavior. A play with such a theme would approach the new Realism. The prevailing idealism is so great, however, that it can be described only scientifically or politically. New Realism needs a scientific attitude in its approach to the theater. Walser's new Realism is not a restrictive concept:

> Jede Betrachtungsart, die durch Umgang mit der Tradition auch nur um ein einziges Urteil ärmer geworden ist, verdient, ein neuer Realismus genannt zu werden(p.4).

A new Realism need not faithfully reproduce reality, but should aim at a minimum of ideological representation. A realistic stage could show the contemporary conditioning to which we are subjected. Walser differentiates between "wirklich" and "realistisch". The first term implies a present, existing entity. The second term denotes the relationship of the observer to the object.

A play patterned after new Realism will give no answer or solution. Walser explains that the so-called positive characteristic of realistic plays lies not in answers, but in the portrayal of our present condition. Realism X should show us our present state in the world. Walser also adds:

> Das erebte Vokabular hat für dieses Verhältnis ein Wort bereitet, das den Realismus heimlich begleiten wird: Tragikomödie (p.5).

Walser arrives at the same conclusion as Dürrenmatt, namely, that the tragicomical element is found in a realistic portrayal of the world. Like Dürrenmatt, Walser refuses to offer one way to see the world, but wants to allow many alternatives. The theoretical writings of Walser and Dürrenmatt reject any form of idealism in preference to a realistical, non-ideological drama. Walser directs his new Realism as much to the audience as to the dramatist. He urges the audience to be on its guard and to see through the myths and illusions it sees on stage. The key phrase throughout Walser's writing is "beware". While his proposals for a new Realism tend to become lengthy and involved, they aim at a continual reevaluation and reconsideration, a re-newal of what happens on stage.

## 7. "Sprechstücke"

It is difficult to decide exactly where to include Peter Handke in a discussion of dramatic theory. He can not be justifiably discussed under the chapter on themes since he has so expressly stated:

> Ich habe keine Themen, über die ich schreiben möchte, ich habe nur ein Thema: über mich selbst klar, klarer zu werden.[23]

Handke's ideas on political commitment in literature have already been discussed in Chapter Three. In his essay "Die Literatur ist romantisch" he argues that literature and commitment are incompatible because literature turns the presentation of political issues into a style. Handke comes to the following conclusion:

> Denn engagieren kann man sich nur mit Handlungen und mit als Handlungen gemeinten Wörtern, aber nicht mit den Wörtern der Literatur(p.286).

Because of his contempt for the existing "commited literature", Handke keeps his novels and plays apolitical. As one of the most consistently experimental of the contemporary German-language dramatists, Handke has introduced a new dramaturgy which denounces dramatic action. I have decided to end this chapter and the thesis with Handke because he is the youngest and most avant-garde of the dramatists who have been discussed. His dramatic theory may lay the foundation for future playwrights - or it may lead nowhere. Few people who are acquainted with Handke's work are indifferent to it. They either intensely dislike it or they hold it in high esteem. The year 1966 marked the start of Handke's breakthrough in the literary world. At twenty-four, he was the youngest member at the meeting of Gruppe 47 held at Princeton. After reading selections from a recent novel, he castigated the assembly for being unable to write anything but descriptive prose. This public outburst was the first of many effronteries.

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[23] Peter Handke, "Ich bin ein Bewohner eines Elfenbeinturms", Prosa/Aufsätze, p.270.

In an interview with Artur Joseph, Handke explains how he wrote his first plays:[24] Handke did not intend for his first one-act plays, *Publikumsbeschimpfung* (1966) and *Selbstbezichtigung* (1966) to be "Sprechstücke". He had at first planned a play with a definite plot, but the plan reduced itself more and more to just words(p.27-28). His intention in the play was to make the audience aware that the stage was something artificial and imitative. By reducing the play to words, a reality just for the stage is created.

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[24] Artur Joseph, *Theater unter vier Augen. Gespräche mit Prominenten*, (Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1969), p.27-39. Subsequent quotations from this source will be indicated by page numbers in parentheses.

> Nur reduzierte sich dieser Plan des Stücks immer mehr auf Wörter, weil sie keine Gegenstände auf der Bühne, weil sie keine Probleme auf der Bühne meinen, sondern nur zitieren und am wenigsten den Anschein einer anderen Wirklichkeit haben - sie stellen eine eigene Wirklichkeit der Wörter her(p.28).

In Handke's first full-length play, Kaspar (1968), he criticizes the theater less but attacks the misuse and abuse of language.

> In Kaspar wird die Idiotie der Sprache gezeigt, die, indem sie vorgibt, dauerend etwas auszusagen, nur ihre eigene Stumpfsinnigkeit aussagt(p.38).

In 1969 Handke presented a new play, Das Mündel will Vormund sein in which not a word is spoken. It seems a logical development from the "Sprechstücke", which consisted entirely of words, to a wordless play, especially since alienation from the language is Handke's main concern as a writer.

> Das einzige, was mich, als Schriftsteller, angeht, ist der Ekel vor der stumpfsinningen Versprachlichung und damit Verrohung der Leute(p.39).

Exposing the conditioning effect language has on people prompted Handke's protests against the theater as an institution in his "Sprechstücke". A play for speaking and a wordless play are not contradictions in Handke's dramaturgy, but different expressions of the same idea.

Handke is a dramatist who puts his dramatic theory into practice. He has successfully shown that he could write a valid form of theater without resorting to the conventions of plot, character, and dramatic construction.[25]

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[25] For a more thorough study on Peter Handke's literary work, see Nicholas Hern, *Peter Handke*, (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1972).

# CONCLUSION

After an examination of theoretical statements, the original question should once again be posed: Have contemporary German dramatists succeeded in formulating a theory of the present-day German theater? To a certain extent, yes. Peter Weiss, Peter Hacks, Rolf Hochhuth, and especially Bertolt Brecht have contributed new theoretical dimensions to the existing as well as the future political theater. Dramatists have supported other dramatical forms in their theoretical writings: Richard Hey has been the foremost proponent for the poetic drama in post-war German drama; Konrad Wünsche has done likewise for the abstract theater. The vanguard among the Theater of the Absurd dramatist-theorists in Germany is Wolfgang Hildesheimer. Although Max Frisch, Martin Walser, Friedrich Dürrenmatt, and Peter Handke have not supported a particular trend, they have made their unique contributions to German dramatic theory. Walser proposes a new Realism in drama, a Realism which would eradicate all existing idealism on the stage. Frisch would like to see a drama which has the changeable nature of man and society as its theme. For Dürrenmatt, the tragicomical form is the appropriate one for today's theater, whereas Peter Handke completely abandons traditional forms and themes in favor of "Sprechstücke" and wordless plays.

But the parts still do not make a whole. The dramatic theories proposed by the dramatists consist of trends, styles, and segments of a whole. What is the reason for the fragmentation of contemporary drama theory in West Germany? I think the answer lies in the situation in which German drama found itself after the war. When the restrictions on foreign drama were lifted, Germany suddenly experienced an influx of British, American, French, and Russian plays. A period of frenzied experimentation ensued as Germany tried to sort out all the new developments and find its own form. This frantic search reached a peak in the sixties, as several forms vied for public recognition and approval. Dürrenmatt, Frisch, and Walser experimented the least with form but relied on plot and theme to gain favor with the populace. Grass and Hildesheimer abandoned traditional forms, themes, and aims in preference for Theater of the Absurd. The political theater gained new impetus in the sixties as Hochhuth, Kipphardt, and Weiss shocked audiences with controversial political themes. Poetic drama existed along side abstract plays while Handke's experimental productions played next to well-made plays. When the seventies arrived, the German theater still had not developed a characteristic form or style.

Like other aspects of society, the dramatic scene tends to be dictated by current fashions and trends. Peter Handke is one of the best examples of the "trendy" nature of the theater world. He rose to fame within a few years as his formless plays hit the theater world with a great deal of sensationalism. Perhaps the majority of the dramatists recognize the rapid state of flux society is experiencing and they realize the futility of venturing a complete dramatic theory. Instead, the most they can do is to make a small but perhaps more permanent contribution to the ever-changing society. Nevertheless, the fact remains that German drama has not experienced any breakthroughs like France, for example, where existentialism was the chief influence in the fifties. Nor did German drama have the continuity of American and English drama after the war.

The problem may partly lie with the dramatists. Dramatists in West Germany feel ill at ease in their roles as writers in the materialistic, anti-ideological western society. West German writers can not justify their work from a political standpoint like their East German counterparts. Except for Peter Weiss and several other minor political playwrights, most of the dramatists cited personal reasons for writing. Although the satisfaction of creating a work is still a basic motive for playwriting, the dramatists felt a need to further justify their personal motivations. East Germany, on the other hand, supplied its writers with a unified dramatic theory from the start.

Their task as dramatists was well-defined: They were to support and further socialist ideology. In West Germany, the dramatists are not so certain about their positions. Although the consensus is that theater is important and even necessary to society, they feel uncomfortable. Their state could perhaps best be described as an "Unwohlsein"; they are misfits in the society. One reflection of their uncomfortable feeling as dramatists is the impossiblity to present an all-inclusive theory of drama. Instead, they present parts instead of a whole - a theme, a form, or a goal. It almost seems as if the dramatists need a rallying point, an ideology, which they can embrace or reject. Paradoxically, most of the dramatists condemn any type of ideology in their theoretical statements. Until the dramatist's self-concept is better defined or a new ideology develops, any dramatic theory proposed by dramatists in the West will probalby remain in a fragmented state.

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